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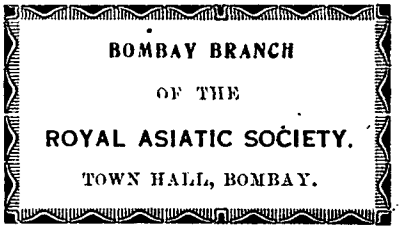

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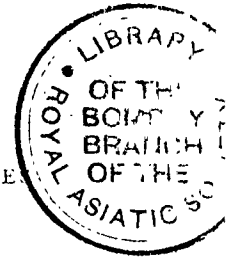

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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A TRUE REFORMER.

CHAPTER I.

THE ENGLISH MAIL.

As we pass along the road of life, it often happens that some quite trivial circumstances that have occurred to us become printed on our memory, and this as if by chance—at any rate without our being able to account for the reason why we should be able to recollect them so vividly while forgetting so much that is more important. Some passing remark made by a brother or sister as we sat when children talking by the evening fire, years and years ago, or the chance observation of some visitor at the house, neither wise nor witty, these motley records of past life are ticketed off as if by random to be indelibly branded on the memory, while whole years of events are but indistinctly blurred upon it, and the very names and faces of later acquaintances have passed away out of remembrance.

It is not surprising, then, that I have a very vivid recollection of a scene which occurred at the turning point of my life, although itself quite without any influence over my fortunes, the event which brought about the change in them having happened some weeks before.

We were resting, a party of five, under the shade of a clump of acacia-trees in the lowlands bordering the great river, one or two lying at length, the others leaning on their elbows, all smoking, with the air of men who had earned a cigar and the breakfast of which some turbaned servants a few yards off were clearing away the fragments. A little further off some grooms with cloths round their waists for clothing were rubbing down the same number of horses with that hissing accompaniment supposed to be soothing to these animals in all climes, while as many more fresh steeds stood picketed by; the nature of our occupation was further explained by a bundle of spears resting against a tree, and in the background the carcass of a boar, with a cluster of villagers sitting by it, passing a hookah of primitive form round for each to take a pull in turn.

"Yes," said Middleton, adjusting his pith helmet for a pillow, and again assuming a recumbent position, with his hands behind his head to soften the cushion, and his two knees and one muddy jack-boot in the air, "that last pig was game, and so was that pie, and this cup would have been cooler if it

had been iced. Blunt, you lazy fellow, you're not half a caterer, to bring us into camp without any ice."

"I never saw such a fellow as Blunt," said Wynne, also recumbent, and with a handkerchief over his face to keep off the flies; "no green peas with the ducks last night, and no ice this morning."

"Too bad," chimed in Howell; "we must reprimand Blunt publicly if this sort of thing occurs again."

"The inefficiency of the commissariat department stands explained," continued Wynne, "when we know that young Blunt is considered rather by way of being an ornament to that branch of the service. Some one ought to write a sensation pamphlet: The Commissariat unveiled, or how Lieutenant Blunt forgot to order any ice."

"There's no pleasing some people," retorted the good-tempered man attacked; "I do all the work, and you do all the grumbling. Perhaps when you've all done talking you'll allow me to explain that I gave a positive order for twenty pounds of ice to be sent out every night with the bread. I daresay the runner has stopped on the way, and is coming up with the tents."

"Very likely, the lazy beggar," said Wynne; "and the ice will arrive just in time to be all melted. And those blessed tents ought to have been up before this. Why, I declare it's nearly nine o'clock, and the hot winds setting in like fury. Pig-sticking may

be very good fun, gentlemen, which I don't deny; but we're in for the hot weather, and no mistake. It strikes me that we ought to bring our brief but glorious campaign to a conclusion. We've done enough for honour. Thirteen pigs in four days is not bad."

"All very well for you to talk, my good sir," said Middleton, "with a six months' campaign in the hills before you; but think of us poor beggars who have to stop behind all the hot weather. I'd rather be out here in a tent any time, hot winds or no, with a good gallop to look forward to every morning, than be stewing all day in a stuffy kutcherry, listening to Ram Buksh & Co. perjuring themselves till they are nearly white in the face. You ought to have your leave stopped for your selfishness."

"You bloated civilians are never satisfied," retorted the other: "do you want to be paid an enormous salary and do nothing for it? Why should you grudge us poor soldiers our hard-earned holiday? Besides, we're of no use if we do stay. Idleness is the root of all evil, my good Middleton; think what a blessing a zealous joint-magistrate is to his country, and you'll find virtue will be its own reward."

"But then there's West here, who has to stop behind also without even being paid for it. Have you no bowels of mercy for him, that you send him back to stable duty and orderly-room before his time?"

"At any rate," broke in Howell, "I hope if we are

to stay out much longer in camp that we shan't be kept without our letters all the time. There never was such a forgetful fellow as you are, Blunt, to bring us out into camp and not lay a proper dawk for us."

"Wrong again," said the imperturbable Blunt; "a runner was to start from Sirdhanna last night; and in fact," he added, "if some gentlemen were blessed with eyes they might see him coming now."

All faces were turned in the direction indicated by Blunt's cigar, where, a few hundred yards off, a man was descried coming at a shambling run along the village path over the plain, a long stick over his shoulder, with a small bundle at the end of it. He was soon in front of our party, and after salaaming, squatted down on his haunches, and, untying his bundle, delivered the contents to the nearest of the recumbent group.

"One 'Englishman,' four 'Pioneers,' lots of letters for those who don't deserve them," said Wynne, to whom the office of sorter had fallen; "and, I do declare, here's the English mail too."

"A dun for you, West," said Howell, passing on a small letter to me, the red wafer on which, almost as large as the envelope, told its own tale. I did not need to open the letter to know that the manager of the Bank of Central India, Limited, begged to inform dear sir that the last monthly instalment on his loan was not yet paid, and that "his faithfully" requested

the favour of an early remittance. The missive conveyed almost as accurate information to the rest of the company.

"This looks like another," added Howell, as he handed me a large envelope with a big seal and the English postmark. "Retribution comes fast on your hoary young head, old West."

"West has got the lawyers down on him this time," said Middleton; "at any rate he finds his letter very interesting. But I wish the English papers had come on as well as the letters. I believe Blunt has been in league with that confounded postmaster, who keeps them back on purpose."

"Well, here's a 'Pioneer' 'extra,'" said Wynne, with a summary of the news; "but there doesn't appear to be much in it. Colonel Pyke has moved for a return of the cost of amalgamating the Indian army, distinguishing the proportion due to each branch of the service, and taking into account the substitution of breeches for overalls, as well as the increased revenue derived from the postage on soldiers' letters. Mr Jawset gives notice that he will move a resolution in the House at an early date for the establishment of representative government in India with equal electoral districts. It is understood that the Secretary of State for India is engaged upon a treatise on differential equations and the quantification of the predicate, which is to appear in monthly parts in the 'Sunday Story-Book.' A pamphlet has ap-

peared which is generally attributed to the leader of the Opposition, to prove the identity of interests between the Conservative party and The International. Mr Merrifield has addressed the electors of Woolwich at a public meeting. In a speech of five and a quarter hours he explained that his sentiments regarding the Irish question have lately undergone some modification, and now announced himself as in favour of a moderate scheme for the introduction of Home Rule into that country. The right honourable gentleman added that it was also open to consideration whether by disbanding our army we might not induce other nations to follow our example of forbearance, and thus inaugurate a system of mutual trust, opening the way for a reign of peace and goodwill on earth. We regret to announce the death of Lieutenant-General Sir Hector Jones, G.C.B., at the advanced age of 86 years. The gallant officer now deceased belonged to the Madras establishment of the East India Company's forces, and bore a distinguished part in many of the great achievements of that army, including the celebrated march into the Ceded Districts under the Collector of Canara, and the campaign against the Zemindars of Madura. Well, this is interesting, but brief. Details in our next, I suppose the old dawk runner would say. Hay, old gentleman?"

The old peasant thus appealed to, who had remained hitherto squatting on his haunches just outside our

circle, raised his hands before him in the attitude of prayer, and with a deprecating smile muttered a remark in the vernacular to the effect that Captain Wynne was his father and his mother. This interlude reminded our caterer Blunt that the courier had not been paid, so his bearer was summoned from the distance; and the old man, made happy with eighteenpence, or sixpence more than his proper fare, made his salaam to the company, and, shouldering his stick, set off to shamble back over the thirty miles he had just traversed.

The tents, which had come up while we were discussing the papers, were now pitched, the servants had got our dressing-things ready, and the water-carriers stood ready with their sheepskins of water on their shoulders, ready to pour the grateful contents over their masters when divested of their hunting-clothes.

"Now then," said Middleton, "a bath and a nap before it gets too hot to sleep, and let us have the horses ready at five. It's no good thinking of lunch in this roaring hot wind that's getting up, so we shall all be light and fresh for another shy at the pigs this afternoon. So, Blunt, mind you let us have a good dinner, and while we are asleep you might as well cool some soda-water."

I then announced my intention of returning at once to Sirdhanna.

Every one understood that my sudden resolution

must be due to the news contained in my English letter, and the announcement was received without comment, but they all protested against my starting off in the middle of the day. "You'll be smothered by the dust, man, not to mention the sun," said Howell, "if you don't wait till the wind goes down. Besides, you can't ride one horse all the way. Send on your fresh horse in the afternoon half-way, and ride mine for the first stage out, and then you can get into the station well before dark." And this plan seemed too good not to follow.

A day passed during the hot winds in a small tent on the sandy banks of the Ganges is never likely to be of the shortest, but on this day reading and sleep were alike impossible, nor could I even sit still; and as a room ten feet square hardly admits of walking, I was obliged to seek the best shelter I could in the plain outside, and pace up and down restlessly through the long hours. But even the longest day must come to an end; and at five o'clock, when the horses were saddled for the evening's sport, I too mounted for my ride to cantonments.

"I did not like to disturb you," said Wynne, who, although he shared my tent, passed the day in Blunt's, "but I saw that name in the list of deaths in the English summary, and thought you might like to be alone. I hope it's not a very near relative, old fellow; but you seemed a good deal cut up about it."

Had I then been acting like a hypocrite? for assuredly

grief was not among the emotions which possessed me. It *was* a near relation, I replied, but we had not been intimate. It was not this had startled me so much as other news received by letter, and which required me to return to cantonments. The fact was, if the news now received was confirmed by subsequent mails, it would appear that I should benefit very largely by the death of this relation. Would he take an opportunity of mentioning this to the rest of the party, asking them not to let it go farther at present, as I did not know how far the news was authentic? And wishing them all good-bye and good sport I rode off. Except Blunt, I never saw any of them again. Middleton sleeps in an Indian cemetery; Wynne was killed two years later in a skirmish on the frontier; Howell was a passenger in a steamer which left Calcutta for Rangoon the day before the great cyclone, and was never heard of afterwards. It would take even a greater change of life or fortunes than befell me to efface the sense of loss their deaths have caused. For although our intimacy was brought about more by the chance which throws people together for a brief season in that land of change and movement, than by any special affinity of taste, who could help growing to like such men as these, so brave, so generous, so light-hearted, two of them at least so clever? Theirs, too, was the really engaging age, when the selfishness and conceit of youth have worn off, and before we get to be crusted over with

the hardness and cynicism of middle age. And, alas! as we grow older, the capacity for forming new friendships no longer remains with us. We cannot, even if we would, fill up the ever-increasing gaps time makes in the ranks of those we have learned to love.

CHAPTER II.

OPENS UP A NEW SCHEME OF LIFE.

THE contents of the English letter had indeed been sufficient to startle and excite; and as I had plenty of leisure to read it over and over again, both during that day and afterwards, I can even now give its contents *verbatim* from memory. It ran as follows:—

"GRACECHURCH STREET, E.C.,
"*March* 18*th.*

"DEAR SIR,—We write to apprise you that your uncle, Mr James West, of Old Broad Street, and The Retreat, Twickenham, died at the latter place on Tuesday last the 15th instant, of bronchitis. By his last will, dated the 20th November, Mr West bequeathed the whole of his property, after payment of certain legacies, to you, his only surviving nephew —appointing his friend, our Mr Paterson, executor to the estate. Mr Paterson will accordingly proceed to take out a probate in due course, as well as to carry out the other measures necessary under the circumstances; but as he will have to obtain your

early instructions on various points, we think it is extremely desirable that you should return home as quickly as possible. We beg to add that, in case you should be in immediate want of funds, we have instructed the Asiatic Bank to authorise their Calcutta Branch to honour your drafts to the extent of five hundred (£500) pounds.

"We write in haste by the first outgoing mail. Mr Paterson will communicate further particulars in due course, and we will therefore merely add that your late uncle's property consists principally of house property near Twickenham, and railway and miscellaneous stock, producing a present income of about three thousand (£3500) five hundred pounds per annum.

"Awaiting your further commands, we are, dear sir, your faithful and obedient servants,

"PATERSON, HERRIES, & CROUCH."

"To Captain CHARLES WEST,
Royal Horse Artillery,
Sirdhanna, East Indies."

A suspicion that the letter might be a hoax was refuted by the genuine appearance of the English post-mark, still more by the fact that none of my present acquaintance were aware of my having an uncle, whose existence indeed had almost escaped my recollection for many years. My father and he had had some serious difference which kept them apart, and after my father's death the breach ex-

tended to my poor mother. I remember to have seen my uncle only once, when he invited me down to Twickenham once for a couple of days when I was at school, but apparently I did not take his fancy, for he never renewed the invitation, and the only notice he ever after took of me was to send my mother a hundred guineas for my outfit when I got my commission, with a cold letter that discouraged any advances on our part. I had heard nothing more of him until now. But any doubt remaining on the subject was finally set at rest by a telegram from the Asiatic Bank the following day, in reply to one despatched on my arrival at Sirdhanna, which announced that the five thousand and odd rupees, the equivalent of £500, were actually at my disposal.

A thirty-mile ride was needed to cool down my brain after the excitement created by this news; but even this exercise, and the succeeding bath and dinner, did not suffice for the purpose. The cantonment air seemed stuffy compared with that of the open plain by the river, and my little bungalow was hot and close for sleeping in after a tent awning, and I lay tossing about all night revolving in my mind this strange turn of fortune. It was not that I cared for money more than other men, and few soldiers were more devoted to their profession; it was not the money to spend, but what it freed me from, and the possibilities it opened

up to view, that filled my brain with excitement, and made swallowing difficult. The youngest captain in the regiment of those posted to the horse artillery, and just now in temporary command of a crack battery, my lot must have appeared a thoroughly enviable one to every youngster in the regiment; and although I had nothing but my pay, most of my brother officers were in the same case, and Indian horse-artillery allowances suffice with prudence and good management for all ordinary wants. But then, as happened with so many others, the whole of this income was not available. A couple of chargers bought, a new outfit on joining my battery, an illness which drove me on six months' leave to the hills the previous year; and I found myself five thousand rupees in debt, which, to get rid of the worry of numerous duns, I had paid off in the usual fashion by a loan from a local bank, that existed mainly by lending money to officers on slight security and high interest. Twelve per cent for the loan, and six per cent for an assurance on double the amount, made an annual charge of nearly a thousand rupees a-year; and while the bond specified, according to the usual formula, that the loan was to be repaid in three years by monthly instalments, the equally common result came about, that I was paying eighty rupees a-month, the utmost I could with difficulty spare out of my pay, while the capital debt remained undiminished, and was

likely to continue so. The only chance of ever clearing it off appeared to be by leaving my regiment and obtaining some appointment which would admit of reduced present expenditure, with the prospect of eventually rising to a higher income than could be earned in the artillery—in other words, to give up my profession, for an Indian Staff Corps officer employed as a magistrate, or on the canals, or in the multifarious departments of government, is a soldier merely in name. But even this move would not bring all the relief I sought. The visit to the Himalayas of the previous year had wrought the change which comes over every man at some time of his life. Soldiering, study, or sport, the things which had before made the business of life, were now hardly distractions. Behind all remained the one unsatisfied longing, the dream always present of happiness that could not be mine. Genteel poverty is well enough for a bachelor, but I had seen enough of its effect on married life in India to know what in this predicament was my real duty. My resolve might be put down to cold-blooded prudence, but it would be really a bad form of selfishness to take advantage of the unreflecting impulse to self-sacrifice which so often actuates a woman, and to condemn the one I loved to poverty in the tropics. From the first day of marriage the difficulty makes itself felt; and even if love is strong enough to conquer the daily and hourly struggles and calls for self-

denial, when two people have to live on what is meant for only one, no love can stave off the inevitable loss of refinement which must take place if the family grows larger while the litttle purse stands still. There are degrees in these things; but a captain's wife in a marching regiment, with a large family, can no more remain what she was, than can Polly Jones the pretty little gunner's wife, who has to sleep in the same barrack-room with a couple of dozen soldiers, and merely a bit of curtain round her bed. Some people, happily for them, have no imagination; but for my part I could not help looking forward into the future; and old Tony Dawson, one of our senior captains, who commanded a field-battery at Sirdhanna, always appeared to me typical of what my fate might be if I plunged into matrimony on four hundred rupees a-month. Everybody said Dawson had been a capital soldier in his day, and he was a good soldier now; but he could hardly be said to belong to the regiment. He certainly "took it out" of the mess as much as he could without running up a bill there, being obliged to subscribe to it; but he had never been known to dine there, and he was obliged to get off all subscriptions, even that for the annual Christmas treat to the soldiers' children. Then he drove his charger in his old buggy, a venerable beast, which the inspector of artillery, if he had done his duty, would have condemned long ago as unfit for even a field-battery;

and the poor old fellow had not taken a day's leave for ten years. His income was not such a bad one now that he commanded a battery, and his promotion was due in a few years; but he had got into debt early in life and had been "in the banks" ever since. But his case was nothing to that of his wife. Mrs Dawson had been the belle of Calcutta, it was said, before she married, and she would have looked a handsome woman even now if she had ever been decently dressed; and rumour had it that she had been a fine player and singer—although, as she had never had the chance of touching a piano for many years, there were no means of verifying this ancient tradition; but the stray visitors who had penetrated to the interior of Dawson's bungalow had never seen her otherwise than in a dirty-looking wrapper, her rather full figure apparently devoid of any physical support in the way of stays, and with her thick black hair tied up in a knot at the back of her head. The said bungalow swarmed with children, the eldest a longlegged hobbledehoy who had been brought up at a school in the hills, and was now hanging about Sirdhanna, waiting for some chance appointment in the uncovenanted service which should involve no examination, competitive or otherwise; then came a girl said to be only fifteen, but who looked like a woman, whom her father occasionally of an evening took for a drive on the mall in the old buggy, and who, it was generally supposed, could not write her

own name; after her followed an indefinite number of boys and girls, who might be seen any morning by the passer-by playing about the desolate strip of gravel round the house which had once been a flower-garden, half-dressed, chattering in Hindustani, and attended by a sweeper-looking fellow with a dirty skull-cap on his head, who did duty for child's bearer. Poor old Dawson! the only happy time he ever seemed to have was when his battery marched on relief from one station to another. He then joined the camp mess and lived like a bachelor, sending his family on by dawk, and was said to be quite a different man during his short respite from domestic cares, taking his glass of gin-and-water after dinner, and chatting about the days of Aliwal and Chillianwallah, where he had served as a smart subaltern in the horse artillery.

Everybody, it is true, need not be overrun by children and debt as was this grey-headed old captain; but such was the ideal towards which it seemed to me marriage and debt always more or less tended, and I would not drag down the girl I loved in this fashion even should she be ready to make the sacrifice. True, there was the possibility of civil employment: every man in India could get the appointment he wanted if he only took trouble enough, and I was what little Jones, one of our battery subalterns used to call a "dab" at the language; but even then one must begin on a small salary and

wait. It would take me three or four years merely to get out of debt; and even if the parents would agree, could I in fairness ask a young girl to wait that time, wearing out her first freshness for such an uncertain future? And then to have the affair discussed circumstantially at every dinner-table in Sirmoori, and to be ticketed off as a sort of artillery Jacob, on probation for four or five years, while my Rachel would be reminded every hour by Laban how foolish she was to throw herself away in a long engagement with such a poor match for the climax. And then the professional sacrifice! A captain of horse artillery without encumbrances is a man of some consideration: an assistant commissioner or junior commissariat officer is a very different sort of personage, especially if he enters a department late in life as junior to much younger men.

Such thoughts as these had occupied many an hour at Sirmoori in the previous summer. More than once, when under the sweet spell of Eva's presence, was I tempted to throw prudence aside: at such moments it seemed as if all calculation were but selfish meanness, and that love was the only thing worth living for; but with separation came back the whisperings of caution, and in the solitude of one still starlight night, after a meeting where she seemed more charming and winning than ever, and I was vain enough to think I had only to say one word to be sure of this sweet prize, the resolution

was formed, as I looked from the balcony of my room over the mountain-slopes to the nook where nestled the cottage that made her home, to carry self-denial into love. But now all was possible. Love and marriage, without sacrifice or remorse, and what is more, a vision of a future, which hitherto had seemed an idle dream, began now to take a tangible shape.

It was not a difficult matter to obtain a month's leave, for although the notion of a man going to the hills on "urgent private affairs" was ordinarily regarded as a joke, the fact that a needy captain was ready to renounce such a piece of luck as the command of his battery for six months, was sufficient evidence of his being in earnest. The colonel and brigadier were both propitious; and making over charge to the senior subaltern, who, never having been in command of the battery before, was quite unable by his profession of regrets at losing my company to conceal the pleasure he felt, I started off by the night train. For a wonder there was no breakdown on the line that night, and I reached the foot of the mountains by breakfast-time next morning. It being early in the season, the stage ponies over which the next forty miles had to be traversed still possessed four legs apiece, and the vestiges of saddles and bridles; and without exhibiting extreme cruelty I managed to climb the last great hillside

soon after sunset, and to excite the poor beast I bestrode into what did duty for a canter along the wooded crest of the mountain; and, passing in the twilight through the main road of the sanitarium and various groups of residents returning from their evening walks and rides, found myself sitting down in boots and breeches at the eight o'clock *table d'hôte* dinner of the Himalaya Club.

There was to be a ball that night, given by the residents of Sirmoori to the wife of the Lord High Commissioner, to which of course everybody was going. I could not go from want of an invitation, and because, moreover, the porters had not arrived with my baggage. For the same reason I could not go to bed, for the furniture of the club-rooms did not include bedding; and while awaiting the arrival of my own, I joined a party of old stagers who preferred whist to dancing. They were men who were ready to go on playing for ever, and my taste for the moment fitted in with theirs, for I was still too excited to want sleep. Thus we all played on till the early morning, when the ball-goers began to return, a few of whom looked in at the public rooms, calling for "pegs," and declaring that they were quite fresh, and ready to cut in for a hand before going to bed.

Some three or four fell to smoking in easy chairs in the balcony, discussing jerkily between puffs of tobacco the events of the evening. It was the best ball of the season; the best of any season; the

Marchioness was evidently pleased with her reception. There were more pretty girls than usual at Sirmoori.

"Yes," said some one, "and the divine Eva looked more beautiful than ever. In my humble opinion, the spins of last year cut out the new importations hollow."

"Yes; and did you see the expression of old Brooke's face when she danced with him? There was a sickly grin of self-satisfaction on it which was positively awful. We shall see him dancing round dances soon if he meets with so much encouragement."

"That's not a 'case,' depend on it," said the first speaker; "there are limits beyond which no woman can sell herself."

"Limits not reached there, my dear boy, so far as mamma is concerned. I thought she looked particularly pleased last night, and the young lady herself did not appear very unhappy. She responded very affably to old Brooke's grins."

"Oh," rejoined the other, "that's merely her good-nature; she looks sweet all round. Like her mother, she has a kind word for everybody."

Now, Sir William Brooke was the governor of a province upon leave at Sirmoori; a man with a good private fortune, and a salary of ever so many thousand rupees a-month. Moreover, he was only about ten years older than myself, and had not more than half-a-dozen children. But these encumbrances were at home and out of sight, and he was to all intents

and purposes a bachelor, at any rate until his eldest daughter should be grown up and come out to him; meanwhile he was a confirmed flirt, always dangling after some pretty girl, and giving sumptuous archery and croquet parties, with splendid prizes of jewellery to be shot or played for; but whether he meant never to do more than flirt, or whether it was that even a governor's salary, with the conditions attached to it, was not sufficiently attractive, certain it was that, although year after year he found some excuse for coming up to Sirmoori—now a proposal for a tax on bangles, now a scheme for a new mode of Hindustani pronunciation, to be discussed with the Lord High Commissioner—the croquet-parties and the prize-giving went on, and he still remained a bachelor, or rather a widower.

Yet this loose talk was quite enough to disconcert me. It was broad daylight when I got to my room, and the crests of the hills were lighted up with the rosy hues of coming day, as I looked from the balcony over to the mountain-side opposite, dotted with pine-roofed cottages peeping out among the trees. It was on such a morning that I quitted the sanitarium last autumn, armed with self-denial, leaving hope behind me. Now everything seemed possible. But the conversation just repeated was tingling in my ears, and came to throw its horrid doubts over the future—I might be too late.

My luggage had arrived during the night, and my

old servant had unpacked my things and made my bed, and now lay coiled up in his blanket on the floor of the balcony, sleeping the sleep of the just man who has walked forty miles over the mountains. I tried for some time to follow his example; but, notwithstanding two almost sleepless nights before, and the ride and the whist, sleep was still hard to woo; turn which way I might, the image of Sir William pulling the long points of his mustaches and grinning over the croquet-balls rose before me, with a bevy of young ladies playing for a bracelet, and one face surpassing all. "She smiled sweetly at him," said the club gossips. I fancied her smiling now, sweetly of course; she could not look otherwise. What if my change of fortune came too late? Well, there still remained the other dream to realise. Thus passed the hours, bringing their torture of doubts; it is needless to detail them; every lover can understand what I underwent without description. At last nature came to the rescue, and I fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

I TRY MY LUCK AT AN OLD GAME.

It was nearly two o'clock when I awoke, and the Marchioness of Killarney's garden-party at Vallombrosa was to take place at four: there was little more than sufficient time to obtain the needful invitation, through a note despatched to a friendly equerry-in-waiting, and to dress, breakfast, and set off on a hired pony to the place of meeting.

The little glen which had been dubbed with the name of Vallombrosa by the English residents at the sanitarium, was one of the few valleys to be met with in the Himalaya, and lay several hundred feet below the crest of the ridge, almost hidden in its setting of lofty cedars with which the mountain-sides were clothed. At the bottom were a few acres of what by comparison might almost be called level ground, occupied by a straggling jungle dignified by the title of botanical garden, and a piece of green turf available for cricket and lawn games, the whole surrounded by a gravel path which did duty for a race-

course, with a hill in one part, suggestive of the further end of Epsom below the starting-point as seen under the influence of nightmare. Here, where the wooded heights gave a sunset at two o'clock, a broad strip of shade, the true Indian luxury, was already spread across the turf, and under its grateful shelter were scattered groups of visitors engaged in the various strife of archery, bowls, and croquet, or looking on at the players. The whole panorama, viewed as the visitor descended from the mountain-path above it, formed as pretty a picture as could well be conceived, the fresh summer dresses of the ladies on the green lawn, set off by the scarlet tunics of the attendants serving refreshments, with the noble forest background of the mountain-side. But this was not what occupied my thoughts at the time. First paying my respects to the Marchioness, I passed on, exchanging greetings with acquaintances scattered over the grounds, in search of the one person I had come to see. There is Mrs Barton talking to the Lord High Commissioner; and I stepped up to speak to them. His lordship greeted me in his usual genial fashion, and the lady was polite, and even kindly, as was her fashion, although I thought she gave a little start which was hardly of surprise; but the presence of the Lord High Commissioner was a sufficient excuse for passing on, and I hurried away after shaking hands. Ah! there she is; only one woman in the world could walk with that grace.

The arrows had been fired, and the fair archers were moving across to the targets, a dozen of them, perhaps, with as many men, and a sprinkling of other ladies, and among them a young girl, gentle and modest, yet who moved like a queen. An escort of gentlemen accompanied her, of whom one was Brooke, carrying the quiver. Does she smile sweetly on him, as those young rascals said? Yes, there can be no doubt of that; but the other danglers seem to come off just as well. Eva could not frown at anybody.

"Now then, Miss Barton, this is the critical point; you know you were allowed fifty points in consideration of your—ahem—your youth and inexperience, so you've only to hit the target once to win."

"Oh, Sir William Brooke, it's no use giving advice, for I haven't the strength of a mouse; it's quite impossible to shoot these long distances; at Toghlukabad they always allow me to stand halfway up to the target."

"Ah! Miss Barton, we are horribly strict up here, and I'm afraid we couldn't break through the rules to that extent even for you. Do you know, I really wish we could, though, upon my word."

So much I heard, and then joined the party. What means that little start, and that blush? Pleasure? or shame at detection? At any rate this evening shall solve the problem.

First greetings over, I fell back among the spec-

tators, and the shooting went on. There were civil nothings to be said all round, for to arrive at the hills as May begins is fair matter of congratulation, and even from Sirdhanna the traveller brings some news. But, looking on between the intervals of talking, it was easy to see that Miss Barton's depreciation of her shooting powers was not exaggerated, at any rate on the present occasion. Her slender fingers seemed hardly able to hold the bow, and the arrows went in any direction but the right one, and scarce half-way across the course. Even Brooke found it difficult to pay appropriate compliments.

But the longest party that ever took place must have an end; already a string of returning visitors was dotting the path up the mountain-side, ladies in their sedans, gentlemen on horseback; and the particular group whose proceedings I was watching began to prepare for departure. At this moment I discovered that my pony and its attendant were missing, and I had to search for some time through the garden before finding them, when all the party had started. It was easy to overtake them, however; the bearers could not carry their fair burdens very fast up that steep path, and the exigencies of limited width involved considerable straggling and slackening of speed of those in rear. One person after another was soon passed: a solitary horseman enjoying his evening cigar; a couple of ladies in confidential chat, their chairs side by side; groups

of twos and threes were overtaken in turn, when, before the object of my search was reached, I beheld at a turn in the path just in front of me a blaze of red. It was the scarlet liveries of the Lord High Commissioner's runners, four of them carrying the Marchioness, while half-a-dozen more, headed by a big fellow with a mace, surrounded the chair. Here was a difficulty. Etiquette forbade my riding past, and these scoundrels in red blocked up the path, and prevented my riding up alongside of the chair. This post was occupied by a stout Member of Senate, who preferred his own legs to those of a pony in the neighbourhood of these precipices. He was holding on to the side of the chair, and his part of the conversation seemed to be carried on with difficulty in consequence of the pace; and indeed four miles an hour at a gradient of one in seven will try the wind of most stout middle-aged gentlemen. A sharp turn in the path brought me into view of her ladyship as I rode behind, and a salutation was the signal for riding up and occupying the other side of the sedan. Scarcely a minute had passed before the conversation led up to an opportunity. What a pretty bracelet that was Sir William Brooke gave as his prize, said the Marchioness. She wondered if he had ordered it from home or had got it at the jeweller's here. She wanted to ask him.

"He's just in front, your ladyship; I'll send him back to you to answer the question," I cried; and

without waiting for any response I rammed my spurs into the old pony, and pushed through the red attendants. Almost the next sedan I overtook, not fifty yards in advance, was that I was in search of, and riding beside it, sure enough, was Brooke. I pushed up to the other side.

Now just at this spot there was room for the two horses as well as the sedan; but immediately ahead the path narrowed; and as Brooke, like a sensible fellow, had taken the inside, I should either have to give way or run a good chance of going over the precipice. There was no time to be lost. "Sir William Brooke," I said, "the Marchioness wants particularly to speak to you; she's just behind:" and Sir William, unsuspicious of my treachery, made a temporary adieu, and, reining up, turned his pony round and moved down the path again. Now then came my chance, and there was not a moment to spare. Already half the hill was accomplished. A short way ahead was a cluster of riders and sedans, in one of which I thought I could distinguish even in the dusky twilight Mrs Barton's pretty bonnet, while the red men with their burden must be coming up hand over hand. Every moment was precious. Yet the situation was not favourable for a love-scene. The sedans affected by the ladies of Sirmoori are like a lounging-chair suspended on the centre of a pair of shafts which are carried by four men. These simple rustics understand not a word of English, but the

language of love is not always spoken; and a lover might well desire some other conditions for a declaration. Why then not wait? Was it that I feared for myself lest presence might weaken the impression absence had formed on her imagination? or did some inward whispering of conscience say that fancy was leading where reason could not follow? If this young heart could really be mine for the asking, would it be for the happiness of both to take the gift? Was it in my nature to make this gentle, simple girl really happy? Some such uneasy questionings passed through my mind, but I was too reckless, too selfish if you will, to listen to them. One look at that sweet face was enough to banish prudence. Another moment and the die was cast.

A minute passed in silence, broken only by the low grunting of the bearers as they shuffled along with their burden. Then Eva spoke first:—My coming up to the hills was unexpected, surely. She had heard that I intended to stay down in the plains this season. This in a low voice, and looking straight before her.

"So I did," I replied, "but I could not keep to my resolution. And you must know why I have come. Because I could not stay away from you."

No answer followed, and, for a few seconds, bearers and all, we moved on in silence.

One little hand rested on the shaft of the sedan —the left hand, the one nearest me. Stooping

down, I placed my own on it, and it was not withdrawn.

"Look at me, Eva!" I said, "and let me see that I am the happiest man alive."

Then Eva looked round, blushing, with half-averted face and downcast eyes, and the slender fingers gave an answer to my question. I dared not raise them to my lips, strong though the temptation was to forget our company.

A few moments more, as it seemed, brought us to the top of the hill, where our path joined the main road, and there was room for a large party to keep together; and here Mrs Barton was waiting for Eva to join her; but this was not before Lady Killarney and Brooke had overtaken us. What explanations had passed regarding my message I know not, but I thought her ladyship looked slyly at us as she came up. Brooke showed no signs of vexation; he was always on too good terms with himself to be put out at anything. "Good evening, Miss Barton," he said, as we came to the point where the road to his house turned off. "We've had a delightful evening, I'm sure; I only hope that next time you'll be more successful. Upon my word, you really only want practice to shoot very well, I assure you."

"You'll come the first thing to-morrow, won't you?" whispered Eva, as we reached the point where the path led up to her mother's house. "Mamma will be dreadfully angry, I know; you must come

and speak to her first." And with this understanding I rode off to the club.

Strangely enough, there was not even a carpet dance that evening at Sirmoori, and after dinner the card-room was filled with whist-players. Contrary to my usual habit, I joined one of the tables where high points were in force, and cut in for a game, the other players being an old colonel of a line regiment who lived on his whist, an assistant-surgeon who intended to do the same but had so far not succeeded, and two youngsters spending their first season in the hills, one of whom promised to be a fine player by-and-by, the other hopelessly bad. But I was in luck on this evening: whichever way we cut, my partner and I always won; and by midnight the colonel had come out quits; the assistant-surgeon had gone to bed, the night being evidently unpropitious for his fortunes, leaving an I O U for about a month's pay behind him in my pocket; the other two between them owed me about seventy pounds. The poor lads hid their chagrin under good-natured congratulations at my success, naturally thinking the gain was of as much consequence to me as the loss was to them; while I went off to bed, puzzled to think how, without giving offence, I might let them off a debt they certainly had not the present means of paying. Now that the matter was of little personal consequence, I was struck as I had never been before with the folly of the custom which permits these high stakes, so

far beyond the means of the players, and this prostitution of a noble game to mere gambling. The amount of the points does not matter, say some men, because at whist luck is equalised in the long-run. But then this cycle sometimes takes ten or fifteen years to accomplish, and everybody cannot afford to wait so long. At any rate, my short run, and the lugubrious hilarity of the youngsters who had contributed to it, made such an impression on me that I have never played for money since.

CHAPTER IV.

DIPLOMATIC.

NEXT morning at half-past ten I rode up the path which led to Mrs Barton's cottage. Her drawing-room would certainly be crowded with visitors from eleven till two, some of whom would be sure to stay for lunch and remain pottering about all the afternoon; so my only chance of securing a few words alone lay in coming early. In a few minutes she entered the room.

"Good morning, Captain West," she said; "this is very kind of you to come so soon to see us." But it was easy to infer from her voice that my early visit was not particularly agreeable, while I thought I could detect a sort of good-natured pity mingled with apprehension, as much as to say that she saw through my little game, and that it was no good trying it on.

There was no time to be lost, for another visitor might arrive at any moment. "Mrs Barton," I said, "I have come so early because I have something im-

portant to say. Last night I proposed to your daughter, and she accepted me."

The announcement evidently took the good lady by surprise. That she had suspected me as a possible lover was evident, but I don't think I was regarded as a dangerous one, perhaps because of my long face and nose, and because I never danced. That I should have gone to the length of making an offer, and a successful one—this revelation evidently came like a shock. She sank down on the sofa behind her trembling and speechless, looking mutely in my face.

I knew what was coming; the simple stock phrases that would be used as soon as the power of words returned; and it would save time to anticipate objections no longer applicable. I therefore added abruptly that I had another communication to make. Private business of a rather pressing nature required my presence in England, and therefore I had further to ask that an early day might be fixed for the wedding, so that we might start off homewards as soon as I could obtain furlough.

This announcement had just the effect I desired. Taking furlough signifies, for a married man, the possession of at least three or four hundred pounds in hard cash. I could perceive that my position was accordingly at once shifted in the good lady's estimation out of the category of complete ineligibles. To talk about starting on furlough in this confident

manner was almost the next thing to laying down a bag of money on the floor as evidence of financial respectability, for such affairs as specific marriage settlements had never come within her experience. Still I could see traces of incredulity lingering in her face. How as to the rumours of my being "in the banks"? Had not Morrison, who was one of the directors of the Central India, told her that I had borrowed five thousand rupees from it only last year, to get away from Sirmoori, Roberts and Williamson of my regiment going security, and that Williamson had simultaneously raised the same amount from the Great Mogul Bank on the joint security of Roberts and myself? Had she not heard these accounts from the most authentic of gossips? yet, if I was not a thorough impostor, they must be untrue.

Such questions as these I could read in the conflict of doubt displayed on Mrs Barton's face, as she sat opposite to me, trying to gain time with unmeaning nothings for making up her mind.

Just then was heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs coming up the pathway. If another visitor entered just now, the battle would have to be fought over again from the beginning. I stepped toward the door, and calling for a servant was answered by the domestic tailor, who was sitting in the verandah employed upon a ball-dress for Eva, holding one end of the skirt down to the floor between his toes while he stitched away at the other. I told him to say the

door "was closed," which vernacular message—the Indian equivalent for our more euphemistic "not at home"—he communicated to the visitor, and shortly returned with his card, while the sound of the retiring horse soon died away in the distance.

Mrs. Barton remained sitting on the sofa while this interlude was enacted: my move was so sudden that she had not time to stop it, and the battle was now as good as won. There remained merely the commonplace objections to be raised—Eva's youth, the suddenness of the affair, and so forth. No girl, she said, ought to be married till she was nineteen. Now, as Emma, an elder sister, had been married before she was eighteen, and Sophy, another sister, only a month or two after she reached this age, I had no misgiving on that score; and as our conversation went on it was evident that my future mamma-in-law was divided between the desire to indulge in the most interesting of gossip, while plunging into the delicious excitement of another wedding, and the fear lest, in her good-nature and too easy trustfulness, she should be doing badly for her daughter. Such anxiety was reasonable, for Sophy and her husband had a regular struggle to live; and if Mary had done well in marrying a chief-court judge, and Emma a well-to-do civil engineer, and Fanny a civilian high up in the civil service, there was poor Harriet on the other hand, whose husband, although also in the civil service and a full collector, had turned out to be

deeply in debt, and was such a screw that he would not let her come up to the hills, or even allow her a decent carriage. Two of the prettiest girls that ever came to India had thus been literally thrown away from want of caution; it was only natural she should be careful now.

At last a hint rather more strongly expressed than what had gone before gave me the opportunity of playing my last card. "Then, Captain West," she said, "you know one has to think of the expense of marriage, so that I really hardly know what to say."

"Exactly so," I replied. "I know how much expense you and Mr Barton have been put to in this way, and therefore I should take it as a particular favour if he would allow me to defray, or at any rate to advance, whatever amount might be needed for this occasion."

I had quite misunderstood her, she answered—as indeed I had pretended to; she referred to the cost of married housekeeping for young couples: besides, Joe would never hear of such a thing as any one else paying for his daughter's wedding outfit. This I knew perfectly well, but my bolt had hit the mark. I could see that the easy way in which I had proposed my account should be drawn upon had removed any lingering doubt as to the authenticity of the gossip about my bank debts. Finally Mrs Barton got out of her dilemma by a compromise, which in fact assured my victory. "Well, Captain West," she

said at last, looking up smiling through her tears as I stood before her, "I really hardly know what to say. Eva is so young, and the whole thing is so sudden; and although I don't want to say anything against the Artillery, which I know is a very fine service, and your character stands so high that I am sure my dear girl will be quite safe with you; at any rate I must ask her father's consent. It would not be proper, as you must see, to let my girl engage herself without her father's approval. So if I bring Eva to you, you will understand it is not to be a regular engagement, won't you?" So saying, and giving me a still very pretty hand, smiling in deprecating fashion, and wiping her eyes, and repeating this caution, Mrs Barton got up and left the room, to return presently followed by the prettiest girl in the world, and never looking prettier than in this robe of blushes, the timid downcast eyes beneath the gentle brow and soft brown wavy hair.

That three persons make no company was never better exemplified than on this occasion. In her mamma's presence Eva was shy and I felt awkward, while Mrs Barton was at best somewhat incoherent in attempts to explain her definitions of a "regular engagement." She soon withdrew, however, to go through the form of consulting "Joe," an operation which fortunately lasted till lunch-time, and gave Eva the opportunity of overcoming the first shyness which every woman must feel on first meeting an

affianced lover who is yet almost a stranger to her What made my darling take a fancy to my long melancholy face I cannot tell, and I think she was still half-frightened at me; but by the time our *tête-à-tête* was interrupted we were on better terms. And then was seen the first intimation of the confidential footing my reception had assumed; for at luncheon bitter beer replaced the light wines which had appeared on the previous occasions of my lunching here. I had never seen Eva drink beer before, but we all preferred it to anything else. It was a very cosy meal. Eva said little, but her mamma was a good talker, and possessed the true politeness of amiability, a desire to please. Besides, here was a new-comer who had only just arrived, and had heard none of the Sirmoori gossip. I think this alone would have reconciled Mrs Barton to the engagement; so good a listener was not to be found in the place, and now I should be available at all hours as a recipient of her confidences.

At four o'clock I had to go away and write letters for the post; it was agreed, too, that, under present circumstances, it would be properer to meet as mere ordinary acquaintances in the evening than to set out together for our walk. Accordingly we met again on the road which winds round the crest of the mountain, and is dignified by the title of The Mall. Here, instead of walking separately with Eva, I walked between the two sedans, at any rate in the

beginning. Eventually Mrs Barton dropped behind to chat with another lady, and Eva and I pushed on ahead, and of course were joined by half-a-dozen danglers, the Mall being very crowded at this season. People, however, for the most part, looked askance at us, and at night a friend at the club took the liberty of hinting the cause. Sundry visitors who called at Rhododendron Lodge during the day having found the door "closed," and my pony standing before the house,—the brute being a white-nosed piebald with an evil eye, and in constant requisition at the club, was unmistakable—there could, he hinted, be only one inference.

But the next day was decisive. On the previous evening Mrs Barton and Eva were engaged to dine out; and the following day I had to attend a levee, and various cross engagements kept us apart till the evening, when I joined them again for their promenade, and managed to lag behind with Eva; and this time everybody avoided us as if we had the plague. There could be no mistake about the meaning of this. We were clearly marked off as an engaged couple, and all Mrs Barton's precautions and injunctions had come to nought. I put this down at first to the piebald pony, but wondered that even Sirmoori gossip should travel so fast; it soon came out, however, that there was a simpler explanation. I might have known, indeed, that the keeping such a secret was quite beyond Mrs Barton's powers. A

secret with her was apparently only valuable as giving you priority of news: what was the good of having something to tell, if you are not to tell it? Hence it was that the residents at Toghlukabad, where the family passed the cold season, Mr Barton being the commissioner of that important place, were almost as well acquainted with "Joe's" little weaknesses as the wife of his bosom; the difficulty of getting him to remit money home for the children's schooling; how Mary, from this cause, came out a year later than was intended, after her outfit and everything was procured, her aunt in England being unable to pay for her passage; how the English horse died of inflammation because he would not be at the trouble of giving it a dose of physic; how, in short, he was the most dilatory and good-tempered of men. Nay, more, the interesting confidences which Emma, whose husband was Resident Railway-Engineer at Timoorgunj, found occasion to impart to her mamma, by letter, under the seal of secrecy, a circumstance which happened regularly every year, were invariably straightway communicated to all the ladies of Toghlukabad, whence, through the medium of the post, a throb of sympathy was duly diffused through each matronly bosom at the former station; so that poor Emma discounted the interest due to these revelations long before there was any visible reason for claiming it. Just the same thing had happened now; and while Eva and I in that first

evening's walk had preserved our good faith by trying to look unconcerned and indifferent, her mamma, as it turned out, had communicated the whole morning's events in detail to Mrs Lawrie, wife of the general commanding at Sikhisthan; and when the latter, while offering her congratulations, asked whether it was not rather a poor match for Eva, since Captain West had nothing but his pay, and was known to be in debt; then Mrs Barton was able to describe my plethora of ready money in such glowing and circumstantial terms as made me, when I heard of it, heartily congratulate myself on my foresight in withholding all particulars about my good fortune. This communication was of course made to the other lady under the pledge of confidence, and equally of course was all over Sirmoori the following day. Hence our plague-stricken aspect in the evening. But the climax was reached later in the day, when Eva and her mamma dined at The Castle, and the Lord High Commissioner was kind enough to apologise to the latter for my not having been invited also, as the Marchioness had only just heard of Captain West's great good fortune. Thereon Mrs Barton admitted the impeachment, adding, however, that it was not a "regular" engagement at present, everything being contingent on Joe's giving his consent, while there was no knowing how her husband would act under the circumstances, or how long he would take to decide upon the matter; after which his lordship was

treated, possibly not for the first time, with sundry instances of that eccentric man's perversities: how he lost the opium agency at Ahfimpoor because he would not take the trouble to write and accept the governor's offer of the appointment; how he had lost his deposit in the Bundelcund Bank because he neglected to register his claim when the bank smashed; and how, finally, Mary (now Mrs Abbot) had been kept at home a year after her proper time, until she was nineteen, because he put off remitting the passage-money till after the cold season. All which incidents of the dinner she related to me the following morning at breakfast, whereupon I considered myself set free from all conditional promises. But indeed Mr Barton had received by implication less than justice on this occasion; for he had sent an answer to his wife's letter by return of post, which arrived the succeeding day, and, as I had expected, he raised no sort of objection to the affair. Young people, he said, in so much of a brief note as we were able between us to decipher, were the best judges what was most desirable for their own happiness, and he had no desire to control his daughter's affections. As to means, the young couple would, of course, weigh well the pros and cons of the step, and not think of marrying until they saw their way to a competency. Press of business prevented his saying more.

This settled the matter so far as papa was con-

cerned; but I have no doubt that "Joe's decision" was being freely discussed in Sirmoori drawing-rooms the previous day, although those who knew him would pronounce that it was a foregone conclusion. Joseph Barton, of the Civil Service, and at present Commissioner of Toghlukabad, had the reputation of being the best racket-player and most indolent man in India. Punctual, but slow, in his official business, steady in his attendance at the station racket-court, he allowed every other description of business to take care of itself. He had never been known to read a book in his life, and very seldom to write a private letter. It was supposed, when he first came out, that he had some relations in England; but after efforts in vain to keep up a correspondence with him, the latter, when he had been a few years in India, had perforce dropped their communication with *him, which* was reopened by his wife on his marriage. This event took place after he had been about six years in the service, whereupon, simultaneously with entering on matrimony, he gave up field-sports, for which he had been famous as a bachelor, and took to rackets. From this time his wife, who was an indefatigable letter-writer, became a constant correspondent with his eldest sister, Miss Barton, in England; and when the time arrived for the first instalment of children to be sent home, they were naturally consigned to the care of their aunt, now lapsing into old maidhood, to whom the charge formed

an agreeable occupation, and the remittances attaching to it an important addition to her slender income. After the first six years of their married life, Mrs Barton made her first expedition to Calcutta to send off the two eldest children, and similar consignments of one or two daughters followed at intervals; till at last, when dead low-water was reached in the Indian nursery, the tide homeward ceased to ebb, and was soon followed by a return flow. Mary came first, then Emma, and so on about every year. Eva was the last importation, and one younger sister still remained in England. Their stay under the home roof was never long. All the girls were pretty and nice, and soon found homes of their own, more or less prosperous and comfortable, there being usually not much more time between the return to and final departure from the parental nest, than sufficed to get out the wedding-dress from England, *viâ* the Cape; and already the worthy man bid fair to rival the patriarchs of old in his progeny of grandchildren, born in various parts of the presidency, and most of whom the grandpapa had never seen.

Barton himself had never revisited England, or taken leave of any sort, his only moves having been from one station to another as he obtained his promotion through the different grades of assistant, magistrate, collector, and judge, till now finally he was landed as Commissioner of Toghlukabad, beyond which post it was generally understood he would not

be promoted. And for many years his wife had never been parted from him, except for the above-mentioned journeys to Calcutta. But when the girls began to arrive from home, and Emma got a fever in her first hot season, Mrs Barton took them up to the hills, and had followed the practice ever afterwards, always occupying the same house at Sirmoori from April till the beginning of November each year, when her household and its attractions were transferred to Toghlukabad for the winter months. Barton himself, however, could never be induced to visit the hills. There were no swimming-baths there, he said, and no fish for breakfast, and he could not play rackets in a covered court. In reality he was probably too lazy to attempt the journey, and rather liked the independence of bachelor life for a time. He could then dine without a coat, and smoke in the drawing-room. However, he was always very glad indeed to see his wife and children when they returned from the hills, and readily agreed to the entertainments which Mrs Barton was famous for giving, when he appeared in a venerable dress-coat of twenty years' service, and usually slipped away to bed when the gentlemen left the dining-room. He always presented each of his daughters in turn on her arrival with an Arab horse, and a handsome watch and chain on her marriage. All other domestic arrangements were conducted by his wife. He never was known to write to any of his children;

but when Sophy lost her eldest boy he shut himself up in his dressing-room with the 'Delhi Gazette' for a whole afternoon, and did not go to the racket-court for a couple of days.

My only personal acquaintance with Mr Barton had occurred several years before, when I was a subaltern with my battery at Mustaphapoor and he was judge of that favourite station; and I had often played rackets with him, and partaken of Mrs Barton's frequent hospitalities. Those were in the days of low tide, when only Eva's younger sister remained at home, a little, pale, fair-haired thing, talking Hindustani and broken English with a peculiar accent. But, coupling what I had seen of the man with what I had since heard—especially from Mrs Barton, who last season used to pour her complaints about Joe's perversity and indolence by the hour together into my sympathetic ear—I had not anticipated any opposition on his part, and his letter was pretty much what I had expected.

All, then, was now happily settled; the engagement might be announced as a fact without qualification; and Eva and I were free to come and go without the exigencies of propriety demanding that her mamma should be following at an indefinite distance in the rear; while everybody who met us in our afternoon walks passed by without interruption, according to the approved custom in such cases. And now my horses arrived from Sirdhanna, and the tedi-

ous sedan could be exchanged for the saddle. Akbar was somewhat too impetuous for Eva's little hands to manage well; but Selim, my second charger, was the perfection of a lady's horse, docile, high-couraged, and with a mouth that might be held by a ribbon. I had never given way to the practice which the too easy ways of our regimental inspector rendered possible, of keeping up only one respectable charger, and passing off any old hack or buggy-horse as a second or third. My debts, indeed, were partly due to a sense of what the service demanded from a right-thinking horse-artilleryman, for Arabians at a hundred and fifty guineas apiece are not readily paid for out of one's allowances; but my imprudence in this respect now seemed like wisdom. Selim was only less beautiful than his mistress; and as the little horse arched his glossy neck and bounded up the mountain-paths which at Sirmoori do duty for roads, snorting and champing his bit as if laughing to think what a feather-weight he carried, he seemed to know as well as his master how well a riding-habit set off Eva's slight figure, and what a graceful picture the two made together. That charming mountain landscape had surely never a prettier foreground.

Then came a ball, to which of course everybody went. Eva wanted to teach me to dance for the occasion, and being no ways loath to receive instruction from such a mistress, we had sundry practisings in

the drawing-room, the round table and sofa being wheeled out into the verandah; but notwithstanding the favourable circumstances, the clumsy pupil did not make sufficient progress to warrant an appearance in public; Eva declared she must not dance with anybody else, and although I begged her to reconsider her decision, and we had almost a little quarrel about it, she refused all partners except for quadrilles; and while longing, I could see, for a waltz, rather hugged the idea of preserving her engagement dignity.

CHAPTER V.

I PRESS MY ADVANTAGES.

By the end of the week the next English mail came in, and my state of expectation for further news was turned into grave anxiety when it brought not the promised letter from Mr Paterson. I did not know then that he was the most indolent of lawyers, or I should have been less uneasy at his silence; but it was the more inconvenient to receive no confirmation of the first tidings of my fortune, in that it was necessary to settle the arrangements for an early marriage without more loss of time. So far nothing had been said on this point, but I could see that Mrs Barton had tacitly embraced the idea that the wedding would take place in the cold season at Toghlukabad, four or five months hence. This had been the practice on previous occasions; for as Mr Barton would not come to the hills, and the exigencies of domestic etiquette required that he should give away the bride, none other was feasible, since fortunately the idea of an engagement running

over the year was not likely to occur to either parent, such long probations being quite beyond the range of their experience.

When I first broached the subject to Eva herself, I think she hardly took in the idea. To be engaged was apparently a great happiness, now that she had overcome the first timidity and strangeness of her position; she enjoyed, too, the sense of my presence about the place for the greater part of the day, and our little confidences after lunch, when visitors took their departure, and we had the drawing-room to ourselves, for Mrs Barton always retired during the afternoon to write letters to her numerous correspondents all over India. At such times, when we had said all that we had to say, which was not often, there was music, besides the dancing-lessons before mentioned, to fall back upon. Eva played waltzes and a variety of little pieces, *pensées, souvenirs, échos*, and so forth, with a touch and taste which not even her country music-master had been able to spoil; and English songs—songs by Claribel, songs by Gabriel, ballads by M. N. with words by P. Q., &c. &c.—sung by her appeared almost to contain some melody, and which so sung, with pretty timid glances cast back at the listener, I thought I should never tire of hearing. Then when the sun got low we mounted our horses and rode round the crest of the mountain, or strolled down to the woody glades of Vallombrosa; while invitations to any evening

entertainments included, as a matter of course, the whole of our little party. Thus in these few days we saw more of each other than in all our previous acquaintance. Can I say that we had come to know each other better? The first shyness was wearing off, and Eva would now venture to express her love in a hundred pretty little ways, and I think was perfectly happy; while it was a true delight to find, as I came to know her more fully, that her open unaffected manner truly reflected the guileless innocence of her mind, and that the slight archness of bearing, which gave an additional charm to every movement, covered no coquetry of disposition. My love wore her character openly, and there were no reserves, no faults of taste or feeling below the surface to jar the senses on their discovery. But yet, can I say that we were really intimate?—that I had found the opportunity for confiding my aspirations and projects—wise or foolish—for the future to a congenial mind? I fear, had Eva known how occupied I often was with other matters—how I felt myself even grudging the time so pleasantly spent, although thoroughly angry with myself all the while for entertaining such a feeling; how eager I was for what I found myself, against my will, regarding as a mere interlude to be finished, and the way cleared for the serious business of life,—had Eva guessed this, I fear she would have thought me wanting in the proper intensity of devotion to the claims of an

engagement in its early days. At any rate, seeing that revelations of this sort would not be received with the needful interest, I put off making them till a more convenient season; nor did I open a book, or occupy myself with aught but love-making, even to the extent of reading the English papers. May I venture to confess that, like other pursuits which people follow because they are conventional, these few days were just a little fatiguing?

The announcement that private affairs involved our starting for England very soon, did not, I say, evolve any expression of interest on Eva's part to share my confidence as to the nature of the business in question. Business of any kind was beyond the range of her simple ideas, while even the prospect of reaching home in time for the London season failed to excite the enthusiasm which I had expected. Eva's experience of England was limited to life with her two maiden aunts in a small country town; after which, the delights of a season of Sirmoori, with its endless round of picnics, croquet, and balls, seemed to comprise all that could be desired in the way of excitement: and even the more subdued dissipation of a cold season at Toghlukabad, where the military invariably gave a ball to the civilians, and the latter returned the compliment, to say nothing of her mamma's little dancing-parties, and at least a couple of picnics at Mogul Bey's mausoleum, had seemed like a new revelation of life.

But when I broached the subject to Mrs Barton, the announcement gave her quite a shock. No mother could part more resignedly with her daughters, unaffectedly fond of them though she was, or keep on better terms with her numerous sons-in-law, a still more difficult matter. But then marriage was a thing to be undertaken decently and in order, and how were these conditions to be obtained if no time were allowed for preparation? Not that the need was deemed to extend to the gentleman's arrangements. When Sophy married young Morris of the native infantry, flinging herself away as the infatuated girl did on that penniless subaltern, all the preparation Morris made was to turn away the chum who shared his little bungalow, and to have his old buggy done up by Meeta Lall, the native coach-builder. The officers of his regiment—Morris being a general favourite—subscribed to buy the young couple a set of crockery, and a plated tea and coffee service (got up by dawk *banghee* from James Uncle & Co., the well-known Calcutta firm, at not more than two hundred per cent in advance of the English price), and the Bartons supplied all the household linen, so that the young couple were set up at once in all things needful; for as to furniture, the regiment was down in the relief to march for the Maghada frontier next cold season, and, as Mrs Barton truly observed, it would be absurd for a married subaltern to be lugging about half-a-dozen cartloads of wardrobes

and tables; so, during the brief season between the wedding and the march, the young couple lived in the primitive style known as "camp fashion," and did not furnish. Then again, when Fanny married Martin, the Collector of the same station, everything was ready provided, for Martin had never sold off after his poor first wife's death the previous year, and he had one of the best furnished houses in the place, with a Europe barouche, and one of Ditch's new palki-gharrees; and so, after the wedding breakfast, Fanny simply crossed over to her new home, and sat down to the late Mrs Martin's neat walnut-wood writing-table (a wedding-present to that unfortunate lady) to despatch her wedding-cards, while the happy bridegroom no doubt stood behind and drew comparisons between the former and present employers of that serviceable piece of furniture, much to his own gratulation, for the first Mrs Martin was not very good-looking, and was reputed to have a temper of her own. But my proposal conflicted altogether against Mrs Barton's sense of propriety, for there would not be time even to get a wedding-dress from England, nor could Eva's sisters be present if we did not wait till the cold season; besides, she could not, of course, be married without papa being present, and he certainly would not be prevailed on to come up to Sirmoori: there was clearly nothing for it but to wait till the cold weather, when we could all go down to the plains. All this and

more poor Mrs Barton urged in favour of delay, and I could only reply that private affairs demanded my immediate departure. The proposal, half hinted, that the marriage should be deferred till after I had disposed of my business, and could return to claim Eva, was at once given up on the announcement that it might occupy even two or three years; for, fond as Mrs Barton was of her daughters, the notion that one of them should remain for an indefinite period under the paternal roof after she was as good as married, was quite opposed to her ideas of the proper course of things. So she was now at last driven into a corner, and obliged to admit that there was no alternative to a speedy wedding; and as soon as this conclusion was come to, the final obstacle of Joe's absence was happily got over. A letter I sent him had not much effect; but in the mean time Mrs Barton had written privately to the doctor of the station to enlist his aid in the matter; and our accomplice, taking advantage of the effect of a slight attack of fever which opportunely came to our aid, so effectually frightened her husband about staying in the plains, that a few days afterwards we received the announcement that he had determined to take a couple of months' leave, and would start as soon as he had packed up his things, or in other words, as soon as he could screw himself up to the unwonted effort. Immediately on receipt of this intelligence, Mrs Barton wrote to her only sister, living in Cal-

cutta, wife of a Member of the Bengal Board of Revenue, to send up forthwith the garments necessary for constituting a reputable marriage. Her own wish would have been, although a better-dressed girl than Eva was not to be seen in Sirmoori, to order her a complete new outfit, without which none of her daughters had ever been married before—even Sophy, when she supplanted Morris's chum in the subaltern's bungalow, having entered that modest tenement with a *trousseau* fit for the bride of a Suddur judge; but to await all these preparations might obviously have delayed the event, and I succeeded in overcoming her scruples by arguing that it would in this case be surely much better for Eva to get what she wanted in England, and thus appear in the latest fashion. So the order sent to Calcutta was limited to a wedding-dress only, with appurtenances; but to lose the opportunity of buying clothes was beyond Mrs Barton's power of abstention, and the local tradespeople benefited accordingly. The sedan of a certain Mrs Jones—who had been lady's-maid to a former Lord High Commissioner's wife, and having married a drunken clerk in one of the public offices, was soon thrown back on the millinery resources of her days of spinsterhood for a living—seemed permanently to block up the entrance to the door; while half-a-dozen hired men-tailors sat squatting daily in the veranda, engaged on various mysterious articles of apparel.

But although I had successfully carried my point, a certain coolness arose on Mrs Barton's part towards me, partly that I was going to carry off her daughter so quickly, although I think she would not have minded the rapidity with which matrimony was to follow courtship if both had come later in the season. As it was, I disturbed a pleasant sort of life; for I doubt if she had ever more enjoyed a season in the hills, than the time which followed the first preliminaries of the engagement: the mystery and the excitement; the congratulation and receiving and issuing of notes which took place; last, but not least, the pleasure of securing a new listener always at hand. I was a capital hand at listening, if not great at talking, and the good lady took advantage of the opportunity to the full. Before I had been a week about the house, I felt that I knew all the little weaknesses of my future brothers-in-law a good deal better than if I had been brought up with them all my life. Abbott's reserve, Garrett's harshness to the natives, Finch's narrowness about money matters, Morris's improvidence, Martin's queer temper,—all these little foibles were dwelt on with a minuteness and circumstantial diffuseness which made me very sensible how accurately my own weak points would be portrayed for their edification in turn by this acute if kind-hearted observer. Joe's delinquencies, however, were the favourite topic; how he allowed the policy of assurance to lapse by neglecting to pay

his premiums; how she could never get him to dine out anywhere; how when the Lieutenant-Governor came to Toghlukabad he stopped away altogether from the ball given by the residents to that exalted functionary; how he had not written to his sisters for twenty years; how (as before mentioned) Mary's coming out from England had been delayed for a season, because he would not remit the passage-money in time; how, finally, he lost the opium agency at Ahfimghur, which would have given him five hundred rupees a-month more than he drew now, and an upper-storied house with the best drawing-room in India, rent-free, because he put off writing to accept the offer. All this and more had been poured into my receptive ears during the trio lunches and dinners that took place in the first days of our engagement, or while Eva was getting ready for riding or for an evening party, till I felt perfectly qualified to write the family biography; while I could not avoid reflecting that it was fortunate my father-in-law's lot had been cast in the civil service, for that he certainly would never have been able to earn his livelihood in any other calling. But under my plan his wife would now lose her patient listener in the middle of the season, and generally her scheme of life for the time was upset, and this caused some slight resentment, although no woman could live less by method or think less of her individual comfort than Mrs Barton; but the main grievance was clearly my silence as to

the nature of my private affairs; and although she abstained from asking direct questions, I could see that her unsatisfied curiosity occasioned more real disquietude than the prospect of parting with her daughter; hence a sort of estrangement replaced the cordiality with which I had first been received.

In one respect, however, my silence yielded its own gratification, for I felt sure that a great part of the lengthy letters posted daily to one or other of the married daughters was occupied with surmises and conjectures as to the nature of my English business. One thing, at any rate, she did not suspect. That a person, least of all a son-in-law expectant, should come into a fortune and say nothing about it, was quite beyond the limits of her experience.

At first it was feared that none of the married sisters would be able to come up to the wedding. Harriet (Mrs Finch) wrote that her husband said his health was so delicate he might be ordered off to England at any moment, and did not want her to be absent at such a time—the true reason being, Mrs Barton declared, that he was too stingy to pay her dawk. Sophy would have come gladly, and her husband too, notwithstanding the tremendous journey from the Maghada frontier, but for certain interesting reasons which rendered travelling just then impracticable. A similar cause prevented Fanny (Mrs Martin) from coming up. But Mary (Mrs Abbott), the eldest sister, although averse to parting from her husband, de-

termined that the importance of the occasion demanded her presence, and resolved to make the long journey from Mahrattapoor for the purpose; while Emma, whose husband (Mr Garrett) was on the railway near Timoorgunj, took the opportunity to give her children the change to the Hills they stood so much in need of. These additions to the family involved considerable alterations in the distribution of the household, and commensurate squeezing of the inmates, for Mrs Barton's house, like most of those at Sirmoori, was a mere cottage on one floor. The second bedroom, hitherto occupied by Eva, was appropriated to Emma and three of her children. Mary (Mrs Abbott) was to have the spare one, not generally used. Eva was transferred to a small place, not much larger than a cupboard, taken off the back veranda, with about nine inches of space between the window and the cliff against which the house was built. A similar recess was fitted up with a hired bed for the two elder children; while another corner of the veranda was separated off by matting into a temporary dressing-room for Mr Barton. These arrangements made, and the occupants in possession of their rooms, the appearance of the little house, hitherto so neat and well-ordered, underwent a considerable change. Mr Barton was the first to arrive, himself coming up the hill in one sedan, his bearer and a quantity of ice and soda-water in another; a day or two afterwards came Mrs Abbott; then

Emma and her children, with three ayahs, two bearers, and at least a dozen coolie-loads of pillows, cotton quilts, biscuits, feeding-bottles, Benares toys, dolls, Brown and Polson's corn flour, tea-pots, and other appliances. We soon began to find that the household was rather put to it for space. The two eldest children could be taken into their bedroom only to sleep, by reason of its size, and so passed their time for the most part in the strip of terrace between the house and the precipice which did duty for a garden, trying their best to fall over the edge, and one of the bearers trying to prevent them. The twins also had an objection to remaining in their mamma's room during the day, as well as an antipathy to contiguity with each other, manifested by loud squalls on the part of one or the other whenever they were brought together. It was found desirable, therefore, to keep them apart; and one might generally be seen in the arms of a wet-nurse squatting on the veranda floor, partaking of natural refreshment, while the other was performing a similar operation with respect to another ayah in the dining-room. The two eldest, as I have said, were engaged in being kept from falling down the precipice; number three was usually in course of being pursued by a bearer about the drawing-room, a proceeding which he resented in pithy but strong vernacular phraseology. Poor little lanky things, they were all very pale, except where the prickly-heat had come out in red blotches, and

looked thoroughly in need of the change they had got to this climate; but between the children, the six job-tailors in the veranda, and a miscellaneous assemblage of pedlars, shawl-men from Parbutti, and jewellers from Shahjehanabad, whose trays covered all the available space remaining, and whose object in life it appeared to be to sit there on the floor all day displaying their wares without selling anything, it will readily be understood that even a lover found the atmosphere rather oppressive; and as Eva could seldom be spared at these times, I am bound to say that business just now kept me a good deal at the club. Eva's sisters, I was glad to find, were both very nice-looking and well-mannered; Mary, the eldest, who had no family, the younger-looking of the two, and somewhat the neater and better dressed. Emma was disposed to be a little untidy, and indeed there was every excuse for her, as between the ayahs, the twins, and the other three children, she seemed never to have a moment to herself. Both sisters were disposed to make a great deal of Eva, whom Mary had scarcely ever seen before, since she came out to India just as Eva went home ten years ago. Eva was better acquainted with Emma, having paid her a visit at Timoorgunj last cold season.

Mrs Barton appeared unaffectedly glad to see her daughters, and bore without a sign of complaint the discomfort occasioned by Emma's little family; but even thoroughly sensible women have the art of

quarrelling with each other, and the management of the children was the cause of small occasional outbreaks. Mrs Barton—and who could speak with more authority from experience?—had a strong opinion of the efficacy of a bottle given once a-day to infants of tender age, in addition to their normal supply of natural food. Emma, on the other hand, was disposed to place reliance for the twins' nourishment on the resources of nature as developed in the two sturdy Mussulmani women who acted as her substitutes, and stoutly resented the proposal to supplement this from extraneous resources, and equally to have recourse to a certain elixir which was said to be infallible in staving off convulsions during teething. This at least I gathered inferentially to be the cause of discord, from such scraps of conversation as reached me when I came suddenly upon the scene, when the dispute immediately subsided into a sort of sniffing, as well as from a remark of Eva's that her mamma did not get on with Emma a bit.

In all these matters Mr Barton took no part. He arrived, as I have said, a day or two before his daughters; and I found him to be a florid, well-preserved man, inclined to be stout, and looking many years younger than his real age, indeed very little changed since we had met in my early subaltern days. He was very courteous and pleasant in manner, but made not the smallest allusion to the matter which had brought him up, being full of the novelty

of life in the mountains, which he now saw for the first time. I took the first opportunity of being alone with him to express my gratification at the prospect of becoming a member of his family, and my regret at not having been able to provide any immediate settlement for his daughter, although (I meant to add) I hoped to be able to make a satisfactory arrangement on this head immediately on our arrival in England.

"Pray don't mention it, my dear fellow," he interrupted me by saying. "I have nothing to give my daughters, and I don't expect anything for them. They've got the fund to look to, and that's quite enough."

I explained that, as an artillery officer, I did not subscribe to the fund, and that, until I got home, I was unable to make any permanent provision for Eva, adding some expressions as to my anxiety until the business should be finally settled. "Oh, as to that," said my future father-in-law, "there is no need for anxiety; young people can't expect to start in life without risks of some sort, but it is to be hoped nothing will happen to either of you." With the utterance of this wish he seemed perfectly satisfied, and I really had not another opportunity of explaining the provisional arrangements I had endeavoured to make for Eva's comfort in case of accidents.

In the morning, Mr Barton used to take a long walk about the hill, attired in knickerbockers and a

suit of ticking, in company with an alpenstock of prodigious size, which he had managed to pick up in the bazaar. The walk was followed by an elaborate toilette behind the matting in the veranda, the only apparent result of which was the changing of one set of knickerbockers and ticking for another, but which did not come to an end till long after the ladies had breakfasted, and the twins waking up from their second sleep were distributed about the house for purposes of vicarious refreshment. By the time his own breakfast was over, and the morning paper read through, it was time to repair to the racket-court, where he used to astonish the younger men by his play, only young Greenlaw of the civil service, who won the University match while at Oxford, having a chance against him. The rackets involved another bath and toilette behind the mat, which prevented his accompanying the ladies for their evening walk; half an hour after the late dinner was finished he disappeared from the drawing-room, when shortly afterwards a portentous snore from the recesses of Mrs Barton's bedroom, which our music and conversation were quite unable to drown, announced to the company that the labours of the day had come to a happy termination.

During this time I saw less of Eva than in the earlier days of our engagement, for, as I have explained, the exigencies of her wardrobe and the milliner's visits kept her very much at home; indeed,

from the preparations Mrs Barton deemed it necessary to make, one might have thought we were bound to some frontier settlement, instead of on a month's trip home. I too had a good deal to arrange before starting; leave to be obtained, bills to be paid, battery business to settle, and so forth; while, even with my humble bachelor establishment, the accumulations of thirteen years' residence in the country had to be got rid of, and numerous were the letters interchanged with the good-natured Blunt, who acted as my agent, on the subject. The result was, that as Eva and I seldom met more than twice a-day, a considerable number of servants found employment in the exchange of notes between Rhododendron Lodge and the club. Sweet little notes hers were, with not much in them, and written in a pretty, but not very legible, running hand; but they were especially gratifying, because I knew she detested writing, and that answers to invitations and all other business letters from that house always fell to be undertaken by her mamma. I have them every one preserved, down to the tiniest three-cornered scrap, in a little packet tied up with a blue ribbon which I begged from a pretty little head-dress that she was wearing one afternoon.

"*Two o'clock.*—Dearest Charlie, five o'clock will do very well, and I will be ready dressed for riding by that time. But do come sooner if you can.—Your own loving Eva." And another: "My own dear

Charlie, I thought we were never going to hear from you again! Mamma says, Yes! we shall be quite alone this evening at dinner, and she hopes you will go afterwards with us to the Seymours. Papa says he can't go.—Your own Eva." Or again: "Your dear note just received. I am afraid there will be no riding this evening, for that horrid Mrs Jones says she cannot *possibly* come before six o'clock to try on the things. It is so provoking, but you will come down all the same, won't you?—Your ever-loving E." And so on. And one little envelope contains only a long lock of the pretty soft brown hair, cut, how well I remember it! after a little scuffle that arose during one of the dancing-lessons, and bestowed afterwards with a sweet kiss of forgiveness. How the faded notes bring back the happy days, "der ersten Liebe goldne Zeit!"

All this time I was in some perplexity about money matters. The sum in the Asiatic Bank was more than sufficient to take us home, but I could not leave the country without an understanding with the Bank of Central India (Limited), and to pay my debt to it would absorb all my funds. The matter might at once be managed by communicating my English news to the latter, when the management would be only too happy to let the amount stand over indefinitely, and to advance as much more as I wanted into the bargain; for to have a creditor on their books with a loan covered by anything better

than personal security, would be an altogether unaccustomed feature in their business. But then the transaction would never be kept quiet, more especially as Mr Morison, the manager of the Central India, happened just then to be up at Sirmoori himself, and was a notoriously leaky vessel. I might just as well tell the story to Mrs Barton herself. However, I got over the difficulty by applying to the Asiatic, enclosing at the same time Messrs Paterson & Co.'s letter privately to the manager; and the doubts which I was beginning to feel as to the genuineness of that document, in the absence of any farther communication from the firm, were effectually dispelled by the answer. The manager advised me by return of post that the five thousand and odd rupees, the balance of my debt to the Central India, had been paid in to my credit at their Calcutta agents. Old Morison, who had evidently been dying to ask me every time we met on the club stairs how I was going to manage to make my way home, appeared now more curious than ever, but he never mustered courage or impertinence to put any direct question about it; he probably thought that I had paid him and raised my passage-money by taking out a larger loan in the other bank, a sort of financial operation quite within his experience. A day or two before the wedding my mind was further relieved by the expected letter from Mr Paterson. It was very brief, and contained no reference, or apology for its

tardy appearance, being merely to the effect that my uncle's property was all in good order, and that he would have the will duly proved, but that as he presumed I should be coming home immediately, it would be needless to enter into details. The letter ended quaintly enough by a remark that the Queen's health was better, and that the new street in the City was to be opened by the Lord Mayor next week—a remark put in possibly to indicate that the communication was not to be regarded wholly as a business one. Somehow, notwithstanding its brevity, it conveyed a not unpleasing impression of the writer.

CHAPTER VI.

A MARRIAGE IN HIGH LIFE.

At last the wedding-day arrived; the wedding-dress, almost to the last the cause of deep anxiety to the occupants of Rhododendron Lodge, reached its destination the evening before, and fortunately proved perfect; but no milliner could fail to fit Eva's figure, and Carvalho was famous for her wedding-garments and her prices. A day or two earlier arrived the magic ring, and with it the necklace of opals and diamonds which formed my wedding-present. I saw it on my bride's neck for the first time when we met at the church, and surely never did jewels shine upon a fairer setting. The ceremony was fixed for three o'clock, and twenty minutes before that time the bride's party left Rhododendron Lodge in their sedans with the curtains up—for the May sun shines with power even at seven thousand feet above the sea—a procession of ten: Eva and her six bridesmaids, four of them young lady friends, and the two eldest little Garretts, these last two occupying a

sedan together—Mrs Barton, Mary, and Emma; Barton bringing up the rear in a sedan carried by a double allowance of bearers, with a prodigious shirt-frill, never worn except on these occasions, and a single-breasted blue frock-coat of wondrous cut, and several sizes too large even for him. It need hardly be said that all Sirmoori was assembled at the church, for everybody knew Mrs Barton and had received an invitation; while the sprinkling of scarlet among the various coloured dresses of the sedan-bearers clustered outside the church-door, betokened that the Lord High Commissioner and Lady Killarney had honoured the occasion with their presence. This part of the ceremony I cannot say I saw myself, my place being at the altar-rails, attended by Blunt as best man, who had with his usual good-nature abandoned his intention of taking leave later in the season, in order to be present now. My first view this day of my bride was as she entered the church with her father, and advanced with downcast eyes to where I stood. She went through the ceremony with perfect self-possession; for happily none of the misgivings which at times rose unbidden in my mind troubled her gentle heart, and she looked as happy and serene as beautiful.

The marriage concluded, the whole party adjourned to the house in a procession of sedans and horsemen, which must have covered nearly the whole of the narrow road between it and the church. This

spectacle again, however, I did not myself witness, as of course my bride and I headed the procession, so the account is merely inferential. It has always struck me that the bridegroom looks rather out of place at a wedding, being, so to speak, an awkward although perhaps a necessary ingredient in the affair; but nowhere does he appear more so than at a wedding in the Himalaya. The bride must of course return in her sedan, for, to say nothing of the sun, the dust would utterly spoil her dress were she to walk; so the bridegroom must perforce either walk or ride by her side—and most men would prefer the latter alternative, since it is not every one who can keep up gracefully with the pace of four shuffling sedan-bearers in the prime of condition. But even then, ride he never so well, the general effect is a good deal marred by the need which arises every minute either to push on in front or drop behind, at the numerous points where the narrow road affords room for only the sedan to pass, and on such occasions he hardly looks as if he belonged to the bride, or the bride to him. However, the short journey was soon accomplished, and all the visitors assembled, as many as could find standing-room, in the drawing-room, where the wedding-presents were on view—the rest in the veranda and narrow space in front of it above the precipice. The gifts were handsome and numerous, for Mrs Barton was very popular, and Eva not less so. Her papa had contributed his customary

watch and chain; Lord and Lady Killarney a handsome bracelet; while vases of every variety covered the table, and promised to form an alarming addition to our travelling luggage. Nor was Sir William Brooke wanting to the occasion or his reputation for gallantry. He had been absent during the last week or so on a tour to visit the Bhamáni diamond-fields, and after spending nearly forty-eight hours in an inspection of that important locality, had returned to elucidate the subject in an exhaustive report of two hundred and forty-seven paragraphs, wherein he showed conclusively, in his usual picturesque style, that if the diamonds should prove to be plentiful it might be a remunerative business to the Government to engage in, but that if they were scarce the affair would be carried on at a loss; and having thus stated his candid opinion, left it to the wisdom of the Lord High Commissioner and Senate to determine what should be done. Sir William was now present, radiant with white waistcoat, and contributed a superb album with a *carte* of himself on the fly-leaf, his elbow resting gracefully on a copy of his celebrated report on the Doolees of the Chabotra.

And now, after receiving the felicitations of her friends, the bride disappeared for a while, and presently her sister Mary made a sign to me to come into the back passage, where stood Eva in her riding-habit. The horses were ready up a by-path at the back of the house; and before the guests had fin-

ished their ices and champagne, and the Lord High Commissioner by leaving had given the signal for the party to break up, we had got beyond the inhabited part of the hill on our way to a little cottage a few miles further in the mountains, on the margin of a noble forest, and much affected by young couples as a starting-point for their honeymoon trip.

Time pressing, our tour lasted but a few days, when we returned to Rhododendron Lodge to make our final preparations for departure. Emma, whose husband was coming up on three months' leave later in the season, had meanwhile moved into a house of her own, and only Mary remained with her mother, so there was now plenty of room; and I am bound to say the absence of the children added considerably to the comfort of the remaining occupants—so much so, that Mr Barton was occasionally to be found sitting in the drawing-room talking to visitors, and would even return from rackets of an evening in time to take a walk with his wife and Mary before dinner. He had discovered, indeed, that after all a covered court was not such a bad thing to play in; and his morning walks with the big alpenstock for a companion having developed into a habit, the notion of a change of life was getting to be distasteful, and he began to throw out mysterious hints about applying for a year's leave and spending the winter up here, which it could be seen already caused Mrs Barton some uneasiness.

And now the days flew apace as our brief stay drew to an end. We could not loiter. As it was, we should probably come in for the south-west gales in the passage from Bombay, and all their attendant discomforts, and the heat in the plains was reported to be very great, so that every day's delay would make our land journey worse. We had one or two rides before parting with the horses, and, looking at Eva as, dressed in the riding-habit as of yore, she galloped along with the little grey bounding under her, it was difficult to realise the greatness of the change that had come over our lives, and that the girl with whom I had barely a speaking acquaintance a month ago was now really my wife. In fact, except that I had given up my club chambers, things seemed to be quite unchanged, and everything at Sirmoori went on just the same as ever. Akbar, by the way, was bought by a general officer who had lately come out from England to take up a division; Selim was accepted by Blunt as a parting present, and he promised it should never be allowed to fall into bad hands; but its young mistress almost cried as the pretty creature was led away.

We went to one ball at the Castle before starting. Eva again wanted not to dance, because she could not dance with me, but I overruled her; and I am sure a prettier or more graceful ornament to a ballroom was never seen than this young bride, who evidently enjoyed the dancing for its own sake, without much reference to her partners.

"You are to be envied your good fortune, Captain West," said the Lord High Commissioner, as he came up behind me, "in winning so sweet a bride; but we shall not readily forgive you for carrying off our brightest ornament in such a hurry."

I daresay some of the people, as they saw my long face above the collar of my full-dress jacket, where from a corner of the room I looked on at the dancing over the shoulder of little Tommy Cuffles, of the Civil Service, who also was not a dancing man, thought that I looked gloomy and ill-tempered; but, in truth, I was unaffectedly pleased to see Eva so happy and so admired; and having won my prize, I could afford to be free from jealousy. But I could not help thinking whether the pretty bloom on Eva's cheek would withstand the ordeal of heat she was about to undergo. She, poor child, having never spent a hot season in the plains, had no conception of what was before her; but I could not help asking myself if I were right in exposing her to this risk in pursuit of a mere phantom, and whether it would not be better and less selfish to put off starting till October. But I was too obstinate, and too much bent on my pursuit, phantom or not, to give way to these scruples.

At last the morning of our departure came. A crowd of porters stood without the veranda chattering or squabbling as the mate distributed the boxes and bundles among them. My bearer, who was to

go with us—Eva's ayah had struck at the last moment and stopped behind—had literally *girt* up his loins, and was loading a diminutive mule with a miscellaneous assortment of brass pots and blankets. Eva's sedan, with its porters in livery supplemented by a crew of four nearly naked additional men, stood in the veranda, and my pony waited outside—the identical piebald with the white nose and evil eye which on a former memorable occasion had stood there as a signal of my triumph. Early breakfast was eaten, the soda-water, tea, champagne, and biscuits packed, and all the family assembled to see us off. Mrs Barton was in tears: I think she was as fond of Eva as a mother could be of a daughter she had seen during only one year of the last twelve; and, to add to her trouble, "Joe" was beginning to put forth more pronounced and ominous hints about the superiority of covered courts, and she was in evident fear, not without cause, that now he had once found his way to the Hills she should never get him back to Toghlukabad again. Barton himself made no reply to the running fire of predictions that his wife threw out of the melancholy fate in store for her, but stood leaning on his alpenstock, a pair of stout legs enclosed in knickerbockers, and a good-natured obstinate smile on his face. He said little at parting, but gave sufficient evidence of his depth of feeling by putting off his morning walk till after our departure, a good two hours later than his usual time.

CHAPTER VII.

A TRYING JOURNEY.

IT is difficult to believe in the existence of the Indian heat in the plains below, when living on the cool mountain-top; but we had not long to wait before being reminded of what was in store for us, and what the ordinary lot of the less fortunate majority of our fellow-countrymen in the East. For the last few days the usually clear air of the mountains had been succeeded by a haze obscuring the prospect, and even at Sirmoori the heat came up to the level of a very hot English summer; and if at seven thousand feet above the level of the sea the thermometer stands at 85° the heat at lower altitudes may be inferred by a simple rule of three. The end of the mountain-ridge reached, the beautiful woods of Sirmoori come to a sudden termination, and we plunged down the steep mountain-side, the treeless, shrubless, sun-baked slope, down for two thousand feet of ugliest mountain landscape to the hot shadeless valley beneath. Thence the way lies for forty miles over a succession

of minor mountains which intervene between Sirmoori and the plains, bare and steep without being grand, over which the path rises and falls with a fine contempt for gradients. Midway, about noon, we halted for breakfast at a little shed dignified by the name of hotel, and towards the afternoon we mounted the last crest, which rises immediately above the plains. This, like Sirmoori, is a European settlement; the top of the ridge is dotted with cottages, and the barracks of the convalescent depot of British troops occupy nearly the highest point of the hill. The breeze rustled through the pines on the crest, cool and grateful after the sultry air of the valley we had passed. The residents beginning to bestir themselves for their evening walks and rides; a few soldiers working in the barrack-gardens; some children playing in the square,—such, as we plunged down the hill-side, was our last glimpse of the healthy European life in cool air, not to be met with again till the journey should be ended.

It was dark when the foot of the mountains was reached at the little town of Palki, a desolate hamlet composed of stones and diminutive hostelries, where the sedan is exchanged for a post carriage. We had hurried through the mountains in order to make the next portion of the journey to the railway by night; but Eva was dreadfully tired with the forty miles of jolting in a sedan, and was quite unfit for further travelling, yet to stay seemed worse than to go on.

The happy travellers who are bound upwards revel in the barrenness of this little town, whose purgatorial wretchedness seems but to enhance the expectation of the mountain paradise awaiting them above; but even they never stay longer than they can help: accordingly a brief meal was partaken of while the carriage was packed, and the old bearer mounting on the roof, we started for Sikhisthan. The night was close and sultry beyond anything I remember even in Upper India at the end of May. The miserable ponies, performing their stage for the fourth time that day, could scarcely be goaded out of a walk; the Mussulman coachman was making his second return journey since the previous night, and, overpowered with his eighty miles of labour on the box, flogged the unhappy beasts with less than customary gusto. No stars were to be seen; a sort of tangible cloud seemed to settle down over the earth; our motion, such as it was, produced no sense of air. Eva lay back exhausted while I fanned her. At last she appeared to be asleep, and I fell into an uneasy doze, from which I was awakened by the jabbering of the coachman and others changing horses. We had reached the wide sandy bed of a river, now dry, and bullocks were being yoked in the shafts to drag us across. The night was as dark as before, but suddenly through its stillness could be heard a low murmuring like distant thunder, increasing every instant. It was a sand-storm coming up, which,

before there was time to turn back and find a better place to meet it in, burst upon us. It was evidently going to be a severe one, and I helped Eva out of the carriage, not apparently too soon. So violent a storm I had never experienced before, and the sandy expanse of a dry river-bed was a bad place to meet it in. To stand upright was impossible, equally so to turn towards the wind, which pelted the face with an avalanche-like shower of burning, suffocating sand. Where the earth ended and the air began, could not be told; the whole bed of the river seemed in motion. I pulled Eva to the ground, and we sat there to prevent being blown away. To speak was impossible for the choking dust, and to hear equally so for the roar of the earth-laden wind. What had become of the rest of the party we knew not; I could not see my hands held up before my face. It was a darkness that might be felt. I held Eva firmly, for if we separated there would be no chance of finding each other again, and we sat thus for a time which seemed interminable, but which may have been an hour. At one time there was a lull for a few seconds, and the old bearer answered my hail from a few yards off; then the storm came on again as badly as ever, and a bank of sand fast forming behind us had just compelled our changing positions when the violence of the wind began to abate. The storm did not, however, end abruptly, as I hoped it might, nor was it followed by hail, as often happens; and it was not

until the dawn succeeded to the weary night that we were able to stir. Then at last, as it gradually became light, we were able to discern dimly the carriage lying overturned, behind which the old bearer was crouching, while beyond it various mounds of sand indicated the luggage which had fallen off the roof. The coachman had been sitting on the ground a few yards further off; the bullocks and driver had disappeared.

Our first business was to lift up the luggage till we came to the basket of soda-water, which, although quite hot, went some way towards restoring Eva, who appeared in an alarming state of exhaustion. Meanwhile the coachman, who had gone back to the last stage, whither the bullocks had found their way, returned with some people, by whose united efforts we got the carriage up on its wheels, and soon after sunrise we had recovered most of our effects; the bulk of the dust, which was a good foot deep in the carriage, was got rid of, and we were able to resume our journey. But our progress was slow, for it still blew very hard, and the road was obstructed by fallen trees, the number of which showed that it was fortunate we had been caught by the storm in a more open place. Meanwhile the heat continued intense, although the sun was entirely obscured by the dust; and it was not until nearly twelve o'clock that, as we crawled along, something like human habitations loomed through the hazy air. They were the bar-

racks of Sikhisthan, and shortly afterwards we reached the hotel, and I lifted Eva seemingly more dead than alive out of the carriage.

This was a bad beginning for our long journey, and I would fain have stayed and given my poor little wife some rest, for the hotel was clean and comfortable, and comparatively cool; but the whisperings of conscience which counselled a return to the mountains were silenced by the pride which refused to confess its selfish promptings, and if the journey were to be continued we should be too late for the steamer at Bombay unless we pushed on; so we started by rail the same night. We had of course a whole compartment to ourselves—for there were no travellers downwards at this season—and were able to make up comfortable beds on the seats; but there were plenty of third-class native passengers, and the noise they made at each station effectually prevented Eva, whose nerves were upset by last night's storm, from getting any sleep. The train stopped at a station about every half-hour, and there seemed always to be more persons awaiting to go on than there was room for, and a desperate struggle ensued on every occasion for the places, with an indescribable babel of voices; old men, young men, women and children, wandering jabbering about the platform, staggering under the bundles they one and all carried,—the railway officials belabouring everybody, and trying to solve the pro-

blem of stowing away two persons in a place where there was only room for one. Not without many orders and ringing of bells is the train got under way; and the clamour of the unfortunate third-class passengers has hardly subsided into a more suppressed murmur before the next station is reached, and the babel of sounds and ringing of bells begins over again. This with the heat—the thermometer stood at 95° at midnight, happily there was no renewal of the storm—and the jolting on this roughest of railways, rendered sleep impossible; and when, before five o'clock, the sun came up, Eva was less refreshed than when she started.

And now the day goes wearily on, marked only by the change in the sun's shadow, the rising of the day wind and its accompaniment of dust, and the ever-increasing heat. The country is everywhere the same—a perfectly flat, desert-looking plain of reddish-brown hue, with here and there a village, its walls of the same colour. It looks a desert, for there are no signs of crops, which were reaped two months ago, and no hedgerows, but perhaps here and there an acacia-tree. Not a traveller is stirring on the road, not a soul to be seen in the fields, but an occasional stunted bullock is standing in such shade as the thin trees afford. At about every ten miles a station is reached, each exactly like the previous one and the next following, and with the same set of expectant travellers crowding the platform, each with

his bundle on the end of a staff, converted by the arrival of the train into the same excited, noisy, belaboured seekers for room as the travellers of the night. At twelve o'clock the thermometer in the carriage rose to 110°; at three it stood at 114°. At the Shahjehanabad Junction we stopped for an hour and found a meal prepared of sodden cutlets and curry, with a decoction of tea, the whole plentifully garnished with flies; but Eva was past taking anything but soda-water and biscuits, and I was not much more hungry myself, so the tempting viands were put away to serve for the passengers by the next day's train. At the Akbarabad Junction there was another halt and the same bill of fare. Gradually the sun went down, and the wind and the dust subsided, and another stifling night succeeded, with uneasy slumbers, broken by the ever-recurring hubbub of the half-hourly stoppages. But the short summer night is soon ended, and the fiery enemy makes his appearance again, this time on the left: we have passed the Prág Junction in the night, and the train has now changed its course and is working across the peninsula to the western coast. Now followed another long day much the same as the previous one, except that the thermometer showed a little less degree of heat; that the carriage, the seats, and everything within, were rather more dusty than before; and that instead of the everlasting plain, hills can be seen on either side in the distance

through the haze. But if the heat was less, the fair traveller was less able to bear it. All this day she was hot and feverish, and lay almost speechless on the couch I had made of the seat. Wet towels hung up to the windows made the carriage a little cooler, but it was difficult to keep them moist under the rapid evaporation caused by our motion through the parching air. Happily we had plenty of ice, otherwise I think Eva would not have lived through the day, so utterly prostrated did she seem by the heat. Not a single European traveller had joined the train since we started, two days ago; and here even the third-class carriages were almost deserted, for we were passing through a poorer, less thickly-peopled country. Almost the only persons in the train were the engine-driver and guard; the latter, a burly ruddy-looking man, evidently an old soldier, came frequently to the door of our carriage to exchange a few words, and inquire after Eva, whose prostrate condition excited his compassion. "The lady seems to feel the heat a great deal, sir," he said, as he stood at our carriage-door at one halting-place, and partook of some claret and ice. "Yes," I replied; "this long journey, too, tries her. But you must have a hot time of it going up and down in this way." "Yes," said he, "I ought to be pretty well accustomed to it by this time, but this last week beats everything within my experience. The engine-driver, you see, he gets changed every eighty miles or so, but I have to go

right through. That's where it is, you see. I declare I feel almost dazed and done up." And dazed and done up he began to look as the day wore on. At last I noticed at one station that we were stopping longer than usual, and, looking out, observed the station-master with several persons staring in at the guard's carriage, so got out to see what was the matter. The poor fellow was dead on the floor—dead from the heat! We could not leave him in this jungle; so, covering the body with a cloth, we went on till, an hour or two later, a place was reached where the station-master in charge was a European, and a doctor and other officials were living in the neighbourhood; and the corpse was made over for interment with a written statement of the circumstances, which the engine-driver signed as well as myself. The poor fellow, it appears, had a wife and children two hundred miles up the line; the station-master promised to send a subordinate to them by the next up-train to tell the poor woman all that there was to tell; and there seemed no more to be done. I did not let Eva know what had happened, and she was too unwell to notice that anything was the matter; and I confess to being too much concerned with her condition to think long about this poor fellow, except so far as that his death shadowed forth the likelihood of a greater calamity.

A third night succeeded this terrible day, and when morning came the fever and consequent shaking

of the carriage together had greatly aggravated my wife's prostrate condition. She complained that all her limbs ached, and every jolt of the train seemed to cause her agony. She was quite unable to lift her head; and but for the ice, of which there was happily abundance, and the champagne I mixed with it, I don't think she would have reached the end of the journey alive. As it was, I counted anxiously the tedious minutes between the stations, which seemed to be ever farther and farther apart as we went on. And conscience heightened my distress at witnessing her suffering, brought about by my selfish impetuosity, and I felt my conduct to be the more shameful that my poor gentle sufferer never reproached me so much as by a look for bringing her this journey, but accepted her condition with perfect resignation. That persons should make journeys of indefinite length at any season of the year in the way of business, on promotion, or even to take up a short lease of acting appointments, she knew to be of common occurrence, and at mention of the word business her curiosity ended. I could not venture to tell her what I now felt to be the case, that my business, seen under the sobering influence of her alarming state, seemed now to be the merest pretence of reality, that it could have been easily deferred for a few months, and that the real object of our hurried journey was a possible fool's errand. How bitterly I regretted now, as the endless mile-

stones seemed to come up ever and ever more slowly, that I had not turned back at Sikhisthan, when return was possible! It was too late, however, to think of going back now; there was nothing for it but to push on to the coast, watching my poor sweet patient in an agony of anxiety.

When the third morning arrived, there was a change in the weather. The sun was hidden, but this time by clouds, not dust, and a cool breeze was blowing from the westward, and soon we ran into a violent storm of thunder and lightning with torrents of rain. It was the first burst of the monsoon on the Western Ghauts. The change acted at once like magic on Eva, and she was so revived during her long halt at the top of the great incline, that I began to hope her prostration might be due to the heat and fatigue she had undergone, and not to any serious illness. The rain felt cold and chilly after the heat, and a warm shawl was grateful in the waiting-room whither I had carried her; while I took the opportunity of our stay here to get the carriage cleared of its three days' accumulation of dust and engine-ashes. The train now started again on its progress down the great incline, wrapped in mist and rain which obscured all view; but at one time the fog rolled away for a few minutes, and we could see the line winding down what seemed to be the perpendicular face of the hill for hundreds of feet, while below was stretched a wide expanse of flat country, all clothed

in green, fringed with fantastic mountains, with winding rivers and what seemed to be lakes glistening in the morning sunshine, the sea visible in the far distance. Then the mist rolled over again and blotted out the view which, after the desert of heat and dust we had passed through, seemed like a glimpse of Paradise; while the sensation I felt at witnessing my wife's restoration only those can appreciate who have begun to lose hope when watching by some dear one stricken with illness.

The bottom of the great incline reached, we entered again upon the sunshine, and Eva, half sitting up on a couch of cushions and pillows, was able to breathe the fresh sea gale which rattled against the carriage-blinds, and to enjoy in languid fashion the beauty of the changing view, as we rushed past woods, wild hills, and lakes set in mountains, till, running through a flat expanse of rice-fields in all the greenness of the early season, we arrived at last at our journey's end, two days before the date for departure of the mail-steamer.

Unfortunately, we were too late for a calm passage. Eva was a bad sailor, and seeing how knocked up she was before starting, I bitterly repented anew of my selfish rashness which had torn her away from her comfortable mountain home at such a season. But regrets were vain. To return was out of the question; the doctor whom I called in said the change to England would now be better than stop-

ping at Bombay; and the second day after our arrival there we started on our voyage.

It was blowing very fresh that morning, and the little tug which took us off to the "Beejapoor" bobbed up and down in the short cross sea of the harbour, thoroughly drenching all the passengers and luggage, and giving us a foretaste of what might be expected outside. There was a respite when the deck of the steamer was reached, for the great vessel lay motionless at her anchor, as if defying the wind which rattled through her rigging, and preparing for the conflict awaiting her. This soon arrived; the mails came on board, and the few persons who had braved the harbour waves to see the last of their friends returned to the tug—among these my old bearer. Dear old man! he had been in my service for a dozen years, during which time we had exchanged perhaps half-a-dozen words a-day, yet I believe he was as attached to me as I was to him. I have seldom felt more keenly the benefit of being well off than when it enabled me to leave this faithful old fellow independent of further service, and to spend the rest of his days with the wife and children to whom he used to remit about two-thirds of his wages, and whom he had been accustomed to see during a brief visit every third or fourth year.

The mails on board, we got under way immediately, and I had hardly time to see Eva made comfortable in her cabin when the harbour entrance was

reached, and the Beejapoor made her first pitch downwards, as if saluting her adversary, and commenced to fight her way across the Indian Ocean in the teeth of the south-west monsoon. Then the dance began;—first a great plunge down which seemed as if there was to be no recovery, and found a responsive vibration at the bottom of the stomach; then a great roll to the right till the boats on the davits were rushing through the water, and it looked as if a very little more were needed to turn her over altogether; but she is up again, and makes a corresponding roll to the left, as if preferring to capsize on that side. This evidently must be the last roll; but no, she thinks better of it, and comes up again on her keel for a bit; and so goes on repeating the process *ad infinitum* by way of proving her stability. I could not have supposed that a two-thousand ton ship could be tossed about in this way. But the Beejapoor had no cargo to speak of, and a duck-punt or a Rob Roy canoe could hardly have danced about more. Happily there were only half-a-dozen passengers, and room for nearly two hundred, so that, although the ports were all closed, the air below was tolerably pure. Had the ship been crowded we should have been suffocated, for although it was cool enough on deck, it was stifling in the cabins. One poor fellow, an indigo planter, going home with liver complaint, and who seemed at death's door, stuck to the deck, himself and his mattress being lashed to

the saloon skylight, on which he lay drenched, with spray and occasional waves, and only less miserable than the native servant, who, rather than leave his master unattended, had broken his caste and braved the horrors of the dreaded "black water." This faithful creature staggered about, more dead than alive, to wait upon the sick man, and when the latter was asleep, lay huddled on the wet deck below him, the very personification of unselfish patience. Happily I had no time to be sea-sick, for Eva's state called for all my energies. I tried hard to get a servant at Bombay, but at this season no eligible ones offered themselves; and the only two candidates were a stout gunner's wife with a strong Milesian accent and a very red face, suggestive of country rum, and a young lady from Goa with bare feet, and a dirty petticoat which comprised apparently the whole of her wardrobe, who spoke only the unintelligible *patois* of her native district, and admitted under examination through the medium of an interpreter, that this would be her first experience of sea voyages. Fortunately the stewardess was efficient, and had no other calls on her time, there being no other ladies on board; but I could scarcely bear to leave Eva even for a moment, for her only pleasure seemed to be to hold my hand as she lay, her eyes closed, a death-like pallor on her face. I could see that the ship doctor was alarmed about her, and indeed there seemed cause for fear. Even the champagne which

was so efficacious on the railway journey seemed to fail; solid food she could take none. Trying as that journey had been, how often I wished we were back in the train again. It really seemed as if my poor darling could not last much longer; and I felt like a shame-stricken heartless villain for being the cause. For nine days we went on in this fashion. Sometimes it blew a little harder, with squalls of rain, sometimes a little less; but the wind was always strong, and always nearly dead ahead. Not a vessel did we see in our course except once, when we passed the outward mail-steamer scudding along under sail at fifteen knots an hour. We were going about five. At last, on the tenth morning, both wind and sea began sensibly to abate, and by evening we were running along in perfectly calm water, with the mountains of Arabia fifty miles off on our beam. We had worked through the monsoon. The next day we arrived at Aden, scarcely an hour too soon, for without the food which Eva was now able to take, she could hardly have held out much longer.

The voyage up the Red Sea was calm, and as Eva could now keep the deck both night and day, the heat was bearable. But the passage through the Indian Ocean, added to his disease, had been too much for the sick man, who found a last resting-place about midway between Aden and Suez. His native servant sat in the waist of the ship for the rest of the voyage, hardly moving from his blanket

except to make his frugal mid-day meal of parched grain, with a drink of water from a jar he had brought with him, and the care of which had been the only thing that divided his attention to his master. The latter had been too weak at the last to specify any instructions for the payment of wages to the poor fellow, who we found possessed only a few rupees; but we got up a subscription for him, and made him over to the agent at Suez, who promised to send him back to India by the next steamer.

Arrived at Suez, the air becoming perceptibly cooler as we approached the head of the Red Sea, a few hours' railway journey carried us into a Mediterranean climate. That sea was in its happiest mood, and as we steamed past Crete and the coast of Greece, the light northerly breeze brought life into my poor wearied darling. The weather was perfect, the steamer not too crowded, the table good, and the little red-faced Italian captain a model of good-nature, who, to oblige his passengers with a view of the scenery, took the inner course among the islands. Eva could now even join the saloon party at meals, but for the most part she would sit in an easy-chair, wrapped in a thick shawl—for European breezes struck chill after the broiling we had gone through—watching the scenery as one island and mountain after another rose into view. To see her hourly getting better, the sense of rest and freedom from the continued anxiety of the last three weeks, the delicious air, and the beauty

of the scenery, made this short voyage one of the happiest times in my life.

By the time we reached Brindisi, Eva was able to walk the deck, and the peaceful aspect of the Adriatic tempted us to continue the voyage to Venice. It would have been wiser to have tarried a while in Italy, before undertaking another long land journey; but Eva did not feel disposed for sight-seeing, and in my selfishness I perhaps exaggerated the strength of the desire she expressed to be at home; but the result was that we travelled steadily onwards, only stopping for a few hours here and there, and, arriving at Paris late one evening, started for Calais by the morning train. The Channel was as propitious as the Mediterranean; and as we sped along in the mail express through Kent, England welcomed us in her freshest, brightest summer garb. Was ever grass so green before as clothes these rounded slopes? And then the air! No monotonous red glare or uniform dull mist, but the sunshine which lights up the country we are dashing through is set off by a background of fleecy clouds in the distance, with golden edges toward the sun and dark shadows behind; and see, over yonder, a summer shower is falling, while here the landscape is dancing in golden light. People talk about the wonders of the East; surely the wonders of home are greater. One must have been absent a dozen years from it to appreciate its beauties; nor does the foretaste obtained in

passing through Italy and France dull the sense of surprise and delight at the infinite freshness and beauty of England when revisited in early summer. Are those monstrous animals which are feeding in that field tame bison, or can they be English sheep? And see! what is that wild beast crouching against the bank below the wood? Is it a wolf? or is it a donkey? No! it is an English hare, which cocks up its tail and gallops off leisurely as we pass by, too much accustomed to the phenomenon to hurry himself about express trains. Then the trim country-houses. Here is one, modern Elizabethan, with its grounds bordered by noble trees, its sunny greenhouses and shrubberies, its garden ablaze with flowers, and its trim croquet-lawn, the very spot one would select to spend a happy life in, and serene old age. Surely it is the trimmest and prettiest place in Kent. But no! we shoot through a tunnel, and here is another, Victorian Gothic, which looks if anything a trifle more comfortable and complete. Close upon it follows a third, and so the whole way through the country. How puzzling it must be to decide where to settle! Here we rush by a perfect cluster of snug places, each in apple-pie order, each representing an income of three thousand a-year at the least. Where do all these people get three thousand a-year from? They can't all of them, like myself, have had bachelor uncles to leave them that sum. Now we come to villas on a smaller scale, but still complete and com-

fortable, belonging evidently to well-to-do people who go up every day to town. The occupiers of that terrace must be able to spend quite fifteen hundred a-year. And now the houses are closer and smaller; but still what prosperous occupations the people must have who occupy them, and what an interminable number of them there must be, descending in prosperity like the figures in a Dutch auction, as we get nearer to London, still ever so far off! people with a thousand a-year, eight hundred, six hundred, five hundred, four hundred, and so on, till that hideous junction is reached where surely no one would live who had any income at all to speak of. And now comes a change—a bird's-eye view of smoke, squalor, poverty, and dirt, till at last, crossing the river, we are lost in a maze of walls and covered ways, and finally are shot into the station, and find a termination of our journey in the grand Belgravia Hotel.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GLIMPSE OF A SPANISH CASTLE.

As we sat down to dinner on that first summer's evening, by a window of the well-filled ladies' coffee-room in the Belgravia Hotel, which apartment we chose in preference to dining alone, and watched the carriages go by with their occupants bound to the opera or other entertainments, I think Eva, notwithstanding her fatigue, shared in my elation of feeling, induced by the bright summer weather and the liveliness of the scene both within and without, and she appeared in better spirits than at any time since we left Sirmoori. The evening dress of many of the gentlemen dining at the other tables, and the opera-cloaks of their companions, showed that they too were bound to some place of amusement, and we felt as if our honeymoon trip was about to begin. Hitherto all had been suffering on her part, and anxiety on mine: we might now look forward to a little unadulterated pleasure; and, but that she was too tired, we too should have followed the ex-

ample set all round, and then and there gone off to the opera. Eva, however, was clearly unequal to more present exertion, and retired to her room immediately after dinner, while I strolled forth to renew my acquaintance with the scenes I had not seen for so many years, and to walk down the elation of spirits which made rest impossible. And truly, if ever a man had apology for exaltation of feeling, I was that one. Relieved from a hopeless state of debt, with the ban of exile attaching to it; possessor of a handsome fortune, and the prettiest girl in the world for a wife, whose sweet face had never for an instant been clouded by a shade of ill temper, and all whose thoughts were gentle and womanly; a holiday before us so long that no thought of its end need rise to disturb the pleasure of the moment,—all these things heaped upon me in half-a-dozen weeks: as I paced the street smoking my cigar, I felt how extraordinary, and also how utterly undeserved, had been this stroke of fortune. All this good luck, too, had befallen without any drawback attached in the way of sacrifice of my military career. On the contrary, it would be easy now to exchange to a battery at home; and sweet would be garrison life in a crack troop, even at Aldershot or in Ireland, as compared with duty in a monotonous Indian cantonment. I smile now to think of the excitement produced by this arrival at a noisy London caravansera, and the prospects

of duty in the Long Valley or the Phœnix; but everything is comparative. Yet I must add that in reality rest and idleness, or even garrison life with a turn of field-days in the lovely spots just mentioned, were the last things I was actually looking forward to.

With all these feelings of exaltation, a sense of our curious loneliness came over me. My poor mother —the faithful guardian of infancy, the sympathising companion of boyhood, the enthusiastic admirer of later deeds, who thought me a miracle of talent because at Woolwich I achieved a moderate place in the artillery, and regarded my first appointment to the Horse Artillery as a special testimony to my surpassing merits as a soldier, much as if such a thing had never happened to a subaltern before—she, alas! was no longer here to partake of the good fortune which would have gratified her even more than it did me. Nor had I a single near relation. Eva's stock of that commodity in England was limited to her younger sister and the two maiden aunts in the country; and as we had come almost as fast as the mails, we had not written beforehand to announce the specific date of arrival. The first impulse with most men returning to England would have been to send for their letters, but I did not expect any; the next to go off to their club, but I did not yet belong to one. Not expecting to come home, my name had been put down at the Union Jack

only about seven years before, and so had not yet come up for ballot. In default of this attraction, I bent my steps towards Westminster, and strolled into the great hall. The portals at the end apparently lay open to the public, judging from the numbers of comers and goers; and although a policeman made at first a feint of stopping me, I was allowed to proceed up to what I had no difficulty in recognising, from a well-known engraving, as the lobby of the House of Commons. Although it was nearly ten o'clock, the place was pretty full of people pottering about—much as one would expect to see them outside a court-house while waiting for a verdict in an interesting trial. Members were coming in and out, and, thanks to photography, it was easy to distinguish several of the celebrities. Mr Merrifield, among others, passed out towards some mysterious side-room in eager conversation with another member; and shortly afterwards Mr Braham, large, solemn, mysterious, and well-dressed; but all of them looking, strange to say, much like other human beings.

I noticed what seemed an incongruous feature in this elaborately decorated hall, a shabby stall in the corner, whereon were displayed a plateful of conventional buns, some unwholesome-looking pork-pies, and portions of rice-pudding, of the kind ill affected by schoolboys, distributed in shabby tea-cups. The notion of supplying refreshments to the weary lobby-

waiters was apparently a happy afterthought, which had not suggested itself to the architect, but had been left for subsequent consideration to supply, the distinction proper between the lower order of beings for whose benefit they were furnished, and the happy mortals to whom these charmed portals are open, being properly signified by the quality of the viands. But yet, surely there is no mistaking that face, that shaggy eyebrow and sagacious mouth, of the tall short-sighted man who, having just consumed a portion of pork-pie and a tea-cup of pudding, finishes his appetising supper with a currant-bun and a pint of bottled ale. To ascertain if this be so is worth the price of a glass of sherry. "Yes," said the man who served it, "that is the Right Honourable Thomas Sinnick. Yes, of course, this is the members' refreshment stall, but any private party is allowed to make use of it likewise." Well, then, Cabinet Ministers are evidently just like ordinary mortals, except that they seem to be blessed with extraordinary digestions; and I wondered how much of the damage set down to the wear and tear of Parliamentary life must really be due to the tricks members play with their stomachs. But while pondering on the incongruity of this shabby stall in the splendid lobby, and the fact that the assembly which professes to administer all the affairs of the nation could not do better for the sustenance of its own body than supply pork-pies and currant-buns, a bell rings, there is a certain

commotion, and the onlookers are thrust unceremoniously into an outer hall.

"Only fancy," said some one by me, "a division on old Falconer's motion, and here is half-past ten; I doubt if the bill will come on to-night."

Just then I noticed a gentleman, who, having advanced confidently up the hall, was ignominiously thrust on one side by a burly policeman, and on his turning round, I recognised a personage who had lately held an exalted position in India, next only indeed to the Lord High Commissioner's, the dispenser of unlimited patronage, the confirmer of sentences on evil-doers, the preceded on public occasions by four aides-de-camp.

"Ha! Captain West," said he, on recognising me. "have you come home? Glad to meet you again. You see," said he, smiling, "Parliamentary officials are no respecter of persons. They act as if they represented the authority of the nation, and were responsible to nobody. This is the sort of thing we must expect all round when the days of a republic come upon us."

"So it seems, indeed," I replied; "but I suppose your Excellency (excuse my blunder, but I was forgetting we are not still in India) means to find a place here before long?"

"Well, I don't know," said the old gentleman; "I suspect there is not much use beginning with this sort of work at my time of life; but clearly the world

is divided into two classes—the men who are in Parliament, and the men who are not. But if a few young fellows like you, now, who know all the ins and outs of army business, were to get into the House, there would be some use in it. It's quite distressing to see the ignorance there is about military affairs. I have no doubt there will be any quantity of nonsense talked to-night."

"What, then, is the debate about?" said I, blushing at his chance allusion to my secret desires.

"The second reading of the Army Bill, to be sure (army bills are a standing dish nowadays)—that is, if there is time for it to come on to-night."

Just then the strangers began to move in again, and so Sir Philip passed on, while I, much ruminating, turned my steps homewards. Clearly there is no time to be lost, if my castle in the air is ever to become a reality, after all the risks, too, that have been run on account of it.

CHAPTER IX.

ON BUSINESS.

NEXT morning we felt inclined to dally an indefinite time over breakfast (and I am bound to say the attendance at the Grand Belgravia is competent to work up to any point of dilatoriness on the part of the visitors), the sense of rest after the journey was so great, and the pleasure of watching Eva, now beginning to look fresh and bright again, no longer oppressed and weary with travel. But business must be done. The first thing in this way was of course to visit one's tailor, the next to go to the city and make acquaintance with Messrs Paterson & Co. There was a difficulty at first as to what to do for Eva, who had never been left alone for so long since we were married; but she declared unpacking would be full occupation, and then Sybil and her aunts had to be written to; so it was agreed she should remain at the hotel while I went to the city, and that then we would go shopping together in the afternoon —for of course Eva also wanted a variety of things

—and wind up by a visit to the opera in the evening.

Ah me! There is a melancholy pleasure in recalling the sweet anxiety of these first days of our English honeymoon! Affairs of state have taken far less trouble to settle than the little details which had now to be arranged from hour to hour for my young wife's comfort and our joint pleasure. A summons to Windsor has caused less excitement than did the anticipation of this first visit to the opera.

A visit to St James's Street, where the pressing requirements had to be supplied which every man must need who has not had the run of a tailor's shop for a dozen years, and a call at a music-seller's for the opera tickets, made it noon when I got to Gracechurch Street, and I confess to feeling some perturbation as I drew near to the lawyers' chambers, and to a sensation of relief on seeing the name of Paterson, Herries, & Crouch, conspicuous on one of a number of plates, at the entrance of a large block of new offices. I had taken the precaution of sending word early in the morning by a messenger of my intended visit, and found Mr Paterson waiting to receive me; a little elderly man with a slightly Scotch accent, a shrewd face, a rather slow manner, and a very obvious wig. After a few minutes spent over inquiries about Eva's health, our voyage, and so forth, we fell at once to the business in hand, and he proceeded to explain various particulars about my uncle and

my succession to his fortune. They had been friends from boyhood, it appeared, having been articled pupils to the same firm. My uncle followed the profession for some years, but gave up practice on inheriting a fortune of thirty thousand pounds, in his case also from an uncle. From this time he retained an office in the city, but his principal employment was dabbling in shares and securities, a process which afforded him apparently constant occupation and amusement, and by which he generally made a few hundreds a-year. The increase in his fortune was, however, mainly due to the savings resulting from economical habits; and when he died it was considerably more than double the original sum, distributed among an immense variety of investments. Thus had been passed a thoroughly respectable, and, it must be added, useless life—recreations in the share market being diversified by the occupation of angling on the Thames, a pursuit to which he was almost equally devoted, and which absorbed all the time not spent in the city. This was his life for ten months of every year, broken only by an annual bout of salmon-fishing in Scotland, which, strange to say, did not have the effect of diminishing his fondness for angling in a punt. "I often," said Mr Paterson, "turned the conversation to his relatives, at times when he would be dining and sleeping at my house, or when I have been staying down at Twickenham with him; but he usually turned the

conversation to something else. Your uncle was a reserved man always, but he grew more so as he grew older, and was especially reserved on this point. Last November he had a very sharp chest attack, and sent for me to go down to Twickenham. 'I feel as if it would go hard with me, Paterson,' said he, 'and I can see my doctor looks anxious; I think I ought to make my will.' This was the first intimation he had ever given me that no will was made; and but that I knew from experience this is the one thing about which even the most business-like men are often unbusiness-like, I should have been more surprised than I was. I quite agreed with him that he should do so without loss of time, and presumed he wished me to draw the will. Yes, he desired this, but was in doubt about the disposition of his property. What, I asked, were his general ideas, as to dividing it among relatives or leaving it to one heir? Well, he said, he rather thought of bequeathing it among various charities. About this we had a good deal of discussion, and I opposed the idea strongly. After some time, when pressed on the point, he said that, so far as he knew, he had no near relations other than yourself; and he told me for the first time who you were. I then said I thought it was the natural and proper thing to specify you as his heir, as in fact you would have been if there had been no will. He did not at first seem to like the idea; and at last, when I kept him to the point, he

asked petulantly, What claim you had on him, or what you had done to deserve a fortune? I replied that your estrangement from him had been very much his own doing, and that there was no reason to suppose he would not have come to esteem you, if you had become better acquainted. You must not suppose," added Mr Paterson, drily, "that I was particularly prepossessed in your favour, for" (bowing slightly and smiling) "I had not then the pleasure of knowing you; but so far as my experience goes, money left to charities is often as good as wasted, and I think, too, it is more proper in every way, and tends to prevent trouble and litigation, that people should leave their property among their family."

I ventured, interrupting, to ask why he did not suggest that he himself should be successor to the property. He had at least as much claim on my uncle's consideration as any one else, certainly more than I had. I could not express too strongly my feeling that my succession was wholly undeserved, and I blamed myself now, when it was too late, for not having, as the younger of the two, made advances to him. But as the case stood, surely an old friend had better claims than an unknown relative?

"That is a fair question," said Mr Paterson; but I should not have liked your uncle to think that any feeling about his inheritance might have been at the bottom of our intimacy. And," he added, with

a shrewd smile, "as perhaps the assurance from an old lawyer that he has as much money as he wants may be received with suspicion, I may add that I don't think your uncle would have left me his property, even if I had proposed it. We were very good friends, but not quite so thick as that.

"Well, to resume. That day nothing was settled; and the following day, which was a Saturday, I went down again to Twickenham to stay over the Sunday with him. Your uncle was still very ill, although up and dressed every day; and it seemed doubtful if he would get over the attack. We did not speak about the will till the Sunday evening, when he broached the subject himself. He had been thinking a good deal about it, he said, and considered that on the whole it would be better to leave the money in his family. He felt doubts, however, about you, knowing nothing of your history since you went out to India. You might be a spendthrift or worse. Excuse my plain speaking, but I want you to understand exactly how matters stood. Well, I said, I suppose one can find out all about him at the Horse Guards. I will make inquiries there, if you wish, on the understanding that if you are answered satisfactorily, I have your authority to prepare the will in his favour. He agreed to this, and I took a note of instructions regarding some small bequests to be included in the draft. I came up to town next morning before he was out of bed, and went straight

to the Horse Guards. They referred me there to the adjutant-general of artillery, I think was the name of the official, into whose room I was shown. This gentleman appeared to fancy I had come about some claim against you, for he was very curt at first, and said it was no part of Horse Guards' work to collect officers' debts; but I explained how matters stood, and that a rich relation desired to make a testamentary disposition in your favour, provided he should get satisfactory assurances as to your character, and the officer eventually became very frank and communicative. He did not know you personally, he said, but he was able to give a very good account of you. The best proof that you stood well with the authorities was, he said, that you were the junior captain in the regiment serving with the Horse Artillery. I asked if he could say whether you were married; and a clerk who was referred to produced a big register which replied in the negative. I thought your uncle would be pleased to know this, belonging, as we both did, to the fraternity of bachelors; but you see the register only dealt with things *in esse*, not with futurity.

"Well, the long and short of the story is, that I took the first opportunity of going down to Twickenham with the draft; your uncle was satisfied, and the will was prepared and duly executed a few days later. Your uncle got over this attack, and might have been alive now, but for imprudence in going

out punt-fishing one cold day in the beginning of March. This brought on another attack of bronchitis, which carried him off almost in a few hours. I was down in Scotland at the time, and did not receive his housekeeper's letter till he was dead. I must talk to you more about your uncle at another time; we shall have plenty of opportunities for doing that, but you will want to know first about the will. Well, I felt a little anxious lest he should have altered it, for he was so much in the habit of constantly changing his investments from one thing to another, that there was a likelihood he might begin to play with his will in the same way; but perhaps he would scarcely have done this without consulting me, and in fact the will was found intact. There is a charge of the interest on five thousand pounds to a cousin in Scotland, a maiden lady, whom he used to visit occasionally when he went down there; and there is a bequest of a thousand pounds to me as executor, which will repay me for my trouble in the matter; and there are suitable legacies to his three servants, and the rest of the property is left absolutely to you, with, so far as I can see, no charge upon it, equitable or otherwise."

Mr Paterson then went into details. The property was being scheduled, and, so far as could be told yet, the present income considerably exceeded the sum previously advised, three thousand five hundred a-year; but a good many of the investments were of

a somewhat speculative kind, which would require constant watching; and they were so numerous and scattered that it would take up my whole time to look after them, as it did my uncle's, if I went into the business myself, or else involve a heavy charge for agency, and very possibly result in losses. The house property at Twickenham was a good investment, the leases having long terms to run; at any rate there was no need to be in a hurry about converting it: but Mr Paterson recommended a gradual consolidation of the scattered share investments into a few good securities, railway debentures, guaranteed India railway stock, and so forth. This would reduce the income somewhat, but would render the property secure and manageable. He had taken upon himself to let the house at Twickenham furnished for the summer, as he thought I should prefer living in London at first, or travelling. Then about the succession and residuary duties. To pay these and the probate out of the estate would cause a sensible permanent reduction of income, and although this was the way in which legatees usually settled the matter, he would nevertheless venture to suggest that the amount of the duty should be repaid to the estate by a loan, which could be easily raised at a low rate on the security available, to be paid off out of income in, say, four or five years. This would be the prudent course. "You will find it quite as easy," said Mr Paterson, "to live on two thousand

five hundred or three thousand a-year as on the larger income; and the increase, accruing gradually as the charge is paid off, will come in very suitably should your family expenses increase by-and-by." As to the funds for present purposes, it would take some time to schedule the estate and make it over to me, but in the mean time I could of course draw what was necessary. Perhaps the best plan would be to open an account with Sturrock's, with whom the firm banked. I had already drawn a thousand pounds, but there was still a balance of dividends at credit of the current account of the estate, and of course there would be no difficulty about expenditure *ad interim*. "Only," said the old gentleman, "I hope you will allow me to take the liberty of offering a caution on this head. Of course I do not know but what my advice may be quite superfluous and out of place, but still I have always been given to understand that army officers are disposed to be rather free with their money; anyhow, young married people are certainly given that way sometimes, so I would just venture to say that people will always find it much easier to expand in their way of living than to pull in, and that it is just as easy within certain bounds to live on any given sum as on double the amount. So far as my experience goes, the people on good incomes find just as much difficulty to keep within their means as those who are only moderately well off. In fact, if it wasn't

the well-to-do folks who get into trouble about money matters as well as the poor, we lawyers should often have a slack time of it. Everything depends on the scale on which you make a beginning."

In conversation of this kind an hour and a half passed very quickly, during which, notwithstanding its absorbing interest, I could not but be sensible of the drollery of the situation, in that a poor beggar like myself, whose connection with the banking interest had hitherto been limited to the anxious provision of the monthly quotas on my humble loan, should now be gravely discussing the comparative advantages of investing in the London and Whitehall or the Metropolitan and Provincial Bank, and other financial problems of the like sort. But although the office was a large one and full of clerks, no one came in to interrupt us, and the old gentleman did not seem to be in any hurry. I was introduced to Mr Roberts, the managing clerk—the two partners were both absent—and returned to lunch at the hotel with a very vivid sensation of regret, amid all the excitement created by this verification of the first news of my good fortune, that my uncle's strange cynicism made it impossible to feel that affection for his memory I would fain have accorded to it, and that his bequest had not come to me out of personal intimacy and regard instead of a cold sense of family duty. I confess also, and not without shame, to an uncomfortable sensation while reflecting that, until

the succession duties were paid, and his control as executor over the estate concluded, it was in Mr Paterson's power to walk off to America with the whole of my uncle's property.

That afternoon Eva and I went shopping, for, having come from India, she had of course nothing to wear; and a Bond Street milliner had accordingly the satisfaction of seeing one or two of her bonnets and other matters of ornamental apparel set off in a manner which must have made the young lady who acted as lay-figure to the establishment feel henceforward her own complete incompetence for the post. We then drove to the Park, and alighting, took seats in the drive and watched the procession of carriages. Eva had never been in London before, save for an hour or so while passing through; and except that she declared herself ashamed of her bonnet, which, having been made in India, partook of last year's fashion—an anxiety quite needless, for anything would have looked becoming on her—she greatly enjoyed the scene, which is certainly to a new-comer the most striking one in town. Simple pleasures often please most. But the result of the shopping and walking combined was that she returned to the hotel so fatigued and faint as to be unable to sit up to dinner, and the opera was out of the question. Clearly the effects of that horrid journey had not been overcome yet, and much care and rest were needed to restore my little wife to her health.

I ought of course to have called in medical aid, and an experienced physician would certainly have enjoined abstention from London amusements and the racket of hotel life; but Eva declared she was only tired, and I was too thoughtless or self-occupied to press the point. Young people seldom understand what is prudent in these matters. They trifle with health till that treasure is lost.

Next morning she was better, and while we were discussing a late breakfast Mr Paterson called on his way to the city to make her acquaintance. His references the day before to my married state had been of the briefest, and I could guess that he was prepared for anything monstrous he might meet in the way of an Indian wife; it was amusing therefore to see his change of expression immediately on coming into the room. In five minutes the old gentleman was thoroughly fascinated, as who would not have been by so sweet a face and such unaffected and natural refinement? He went away having engaged us to dine at his house the following day; and hearing Eva say that she was fond of music, the dinner was fixed for six o'clock, in order that we might all go to Covent Garden afterwards. But one little complication occurred. Mr Paterson was beginning to speak to Eva about my accession of fortune, which she, I think, took at first to be meant as a compliment to her, whereon I interrupted him by saying, "Mr Paterson, Eva, is managing some property

which has been left to me lately, about which I will speak to you by-and-by;" and he took the hint and stopped talking on this topic; but I could discern an expression of amused surprise on his face, as much as to say, how comes all this affection with so little confidence? But indeed there had been little opportunity during the journey to talk about business, Eva having been too weak and ill to take an interest in such things; and so the idea had taken root to say nothing about it then, but to keep the announcement for a little surprise on our arrival.

Accordingly, after Mr Paterson was gone, I told Eva that the property he had referred to had just come to me from an uncle, and was very considerable, and in fact had quite made a change in my position and plans in life. This indeed, I added, was the pleasant business which has brought us home. Eva was naturally delighted at this news; she had fancied, she said, that the business was something to do with the Horse Guards, which officers were always talking about. "But have you really got as much money as you want? Mamma told me that all artillery officers were dreadfully poor, and that I should have to be very careful and saving, and think about every farthing I spent on dress and everything else, and I felt horribly anxious yesterday after the shopping, when I saw what a lot of money you paid." But should I leave the army? she hoped not. She admired her husband, she was pleased to say, in his

uniform, and it was so nice having pretty chargers to ride.

I explained that there would be time enough to think about leaving the army or staying in it, a couple of years hence, when my leave would come to an end; and that meantime we could look about us, and frame a scheme of life.

"Oh, how charming!" said Eva, with two of the prettiest hands in the world resting crossed on my shoulder; "then it won't be wicked extravagance to go to the opera, and to get some proper dresses, and to buy Syb and my aunts and Mary Drew something nice to take down to Leatherby?"

"There is nothing, my darling" (this "after compliments," as they say in the preamble of an Eastern letter), "between your wishes and your conscience. I think our purse will stand as many opera tickets as you are likely to want, and you can't dress too nicely to please your old husband; and as for the presents for your sister and aunts, let us go out and choose them this very morning."

But where was the property? Eva asked; and was there a nice house on it? I explained that it was not landed property, but shares and suchlike investments, some of them more or less risky, and which ought to be converted as soon as possible into more substantial securities; and, in fact, that this conversion was the principal business on hand. "Oh! I never shall be able to understand all about

that," said Eva; "but I thought a property always meant a house and grounds. Mr Drew and Mr Bamfylde, and all the gentlemen of property about Leatherby, all have houses and grounds. But I suppose you will buy a house and grounds with a pretty garden, by-and-by, won't you? It will be so nice to have a pretty flower-garden all of our own."

A dissertation was thereupon commenced, with all the authority due to my recently-acquired knowledge on the subject, regarding the loss arising in the transfer of investments from superior stocks to land, by reason of the smaller interest obtainable from the latter species of security; but the pretty listener did not appear to follow me, and tried in vain to seem interested in the matter, so I put off initiating her further into the mysteries of my affairs till a more convenient season. It would clearly be premature to bother her little head with such matters at present.

"No letter from your sister or aunts this morning?" I asked next day at breakfast. "What can have happened that they don't write?"

Eva blushed, looking prettier than ever. "Oh, my dearest Charlie! what will you say? I'm afraid it's all my fault for never having written."

"Not written! You don't mean to say that you've not let them know of our arrival? I thought you wrote the first morning we were here, while I went into the city?

"Oh yes, I fully intended to; but then, you know

I was unpacking, and then I got so tired and had to lie down, and then you came back, and then we went out together, you know, and then I was so unwell in the evening, and all yesterday there really was not a moment. Dear little Syb, I hope she won't think me unkind. I am sure I never meant to be."

"Well, I should fear both she and your aunts may feel a little hurt, when they learn that we have been three days in England, and have never sent them even a line to tell them of it. However, the best thing to do now is to telegraph and ask Sybil to come up and join us at once."

Eva was sure her aunt would never allow her to come. Aunt Emily never let any of the girls go away from home without accompanying them. Mamma's instructions had been very strict on this point.

"Very good, then, let us ask one of your aunts to come up too. We should be delighted to see her, and why should she not enjoy a visit to town as well as her niece?"

It would indeed be charming if Aunt Emily could come up, Eva said, but she did not think either of them would go away from home just now. Aunt Honoria never went anywhere, and Aunt Emily could not leave Mary Drew. She was equally certain that they would never answer a telegram, which would only have the effect of flurrying them. However, the telegram was duly despatched, and Eva

went to her room to write her letter, resisting all my proposals that she should use the more convenient writing-table provided in our sitting-room.

That evening we dined with Mr Paterson at his house in Sackville Street, a party of six to fill the opera-box, as he said, apologising for the small number of guests to meet us; Mr and Mrs Herries, and a young lady, a pupil of the Royal Academy of Music, who was a sort of ward of his, and reputed to be a very fine singer; but we had not an opportunity of hearing her that evening. Herries appeared a good deal younger than his partner, and a very different sort of man, with dark hair and beard, aquiline nose, and quick active eyes mounted with spectacles. Mrs Herries was a tall handsome woman, with a refined and melancholy face. Although the dinner was for half-a-dozen persons, it would have served for twenty. There was a needless profusion of courses, wines, and waiters; and although we sat down soon after six, it was barely over in time for the opera. The young ladies both looked tired; Mr Herries became silent; while I felt thoroughly angry with myself when a droll thought came into my head that possibly all this demonstration was a mere blind, that Mrs Herries was a graceful accomplice of the sort described in a sensation novel, and that the old lawyer had made his plans to start for Liverpool after the opera. Mr Paterson, however, happily unconscious of the dark suspicions entertained about

him, and who was evidently fascinated by Eva's pretty face and winning manners, did not appear to find the time at all too long, but enjoyed his party immensely, doing the honours of the table with great *empressement*, while Mrs Herries was apparently not a person with too much employment, or likely to be soon bored. However, we got to the opera at last. Mr Paterson had secured a box on the grand tier; and although the piece happened to be one of Verdi's feeblest, Eva's gratification at this her first visit was sufficiently evident, albeit she was not given to be demonstrative in public, and I found sufficient pleasure in admiring her, and observing the admiration she created. The young lady from the Royal Academy—who, by the way, was very well looking and set off the box excellently—took a keen professional interest in the performance, informing me in confidence that Cipriani had no voice left to speak of, and shaking her head ominously at a certain doubtful shake of the prima donna. Mr Paterson, who had done justice to his good dinner, after the first half-hour went fast asleep; while Mr Herries, discovering an acquaintance in the stalls, went down and spent the evening in an animated conversation with him apparently on business. We returned to the hotel in great spirits, but Eva was very tired and unfit for exertion next day. These amusements must evidently be indulged in with caution, if the recovery of her strength was not to be retarded.

CHAPTER X.

EXTENDS MY FAMILY ACQUAINTANCE.

As Eva had foretold, her aunt did not prove equal to the emergency of answering by telegram; but she, as well as Sybil, wrote in reply to Eva's letter by return of post; and, as she also foretold, Sybil was not to be allowed to join us. Her aunt did not feel at liberty to trust her away from home, nor could either of the elder ladies accept our invitation; Aunt Honoria was not very well, and Aunt Emily could not leave her alone just at present (Aunt Emily never did leave her, Eva said); but would not we go down at once and stay as long as we could spare time for? And as it appeared the estate would not be scheduled for some weeks, and there was really no urgent business to keep us in town, we started off a day or two afterwards, not, however, before we had promised to occupy Mr Paterson's house on our return, instead of stopping at the Belgravia, and also to pay Mrs Herries a visit at Bushey.

"This is a small world we live in," said the old

gentleman, as he bid us good-bye. "Only think that Mrs West should have been brought up at Leatherby, a place I know so well. The fact is that one of the members, Mr Sheepshanks, is a very old friend. A most truly excellent man he is, indeed, and owns half the town. I wish you could know him. I would send an introduction and ask him to call and see you, but that I know it would be of no use. He never visits anywhere."

I did not feel impressed with any eager longing to make the acquaintance of the excellent Mr Sheepshanks, and intimated that we could bear the deprivation with resignation; but we promised to take the opportunity to go over his factory, which Mr Paterson said was one of the largest and most interesting in the kingdom. And we started off one fine morning by the Yewcester express.

If London was delightful in the latter days of a fresh June, what shall be said of the charms of the country, which in our brief hotel life we had almost forgotten to think about? Not that the country through which we passed was especially picturesque or interesting; nevertheless, the greenness of the grass, the splendid trees, the soft air, the mere sensation of living in such a country after so long an exile from it, was an ecstasy in itself; this ride brought back the sensation of delight given by our first journey through Kent. But it is useless to expatiate on these sensations; the long absence must be under-

gone from these sweet English scenes before the full delight of revisiting them can be understood.

Leatherby appeared at first sight to be one of those towns so common in England which exist in defiance of all principles of political economy, serving no apparent purpose but to send a member or two to Parliament, and to furnish a livelihood to about ten times the number of small tradesmen really needed for supplying the wants of the population, and where they live like fish in a pond by preying on each other, the butcher selling dear meat to the baker, and the baker dear bread to the butcher, and the plumber taking out his share of a livelihood by small jobs in bad workmanship all round; while a few farmers and small annuitants contribute the surplus expenditure, which forms, after all, the ultimate means of support to the whole community. This was the apparent aspect of the sleepy little town, which lies sheltered and stuffy, nestled among hills on the banks of the Yew, at this part of its course merely a shallow trout-stream. But this first impression was dispelled at sight of the large mill referred to by Mr Paterson, which rose up above the bank of the river, quite destroying by its size the due perspective of the hills, yet forming, with its ivy-covered walls and shelter of tall poplars a not unpleasing feature in the landscape. The town, it was evident, lived upon the mill, or, as it was always called, the factory; while the spare spendings of the neighbouring farmers

aforesaid, and the occasional country gentlemen who were too lazy or good-natured to do all their shopping in Yewcester or London, came in as a sort of bonus or extra dividend to the grocers and drapers of the place. The town generally appeared to belong to Mr Sheepshanks; the two trucks which stood in the station siding had a decayed label on each with his address, which seemed to do permanent duty on behalf of the mill: the Fore Street was adorned by a town hall, with an inscription notifying that it had been erected by John Sheepshanks, Esquire, M.P. for the borough; a tablet in the south aisle of the parish church proclaimed that it had been restored at the sole expense of the same generous representative, who, by the way, was a Dissenter himself, and always went to the Independent chapel; while a new church in the lower part of the town had been built entirely at his cost. The greater portion of the lower town, moreover, consisted of neat terraces constructed by him for his operatives in the days of the ten-pound householder. The other member was a certain Lord Wraymouth, at present holding a subordinate post in the Government—an elderly gentleman, whose father, the Earl of Stowe, had declined to make way for him at a reasonable age—who himself did not own an acre of land in the borough, where he never appeared except at election times, and whose principal connection with the place appeared to consist in an annual subscription of five-and-twenty pounds to the town races.

But all this information I acquired by degrees, and not during our journey to Leatherby. Sybil and Mary Drew met us at the station, and we walked up the little town to the house, sending our luggage on by the Three Butts omnibus. Sybil was very like Eva, not quite so tall, but almost as pretty, and with the same profusion of light-brown wavy hair; very shy at first, and always more or less so when in my company, but able to talk sometimes, as I could judge by the peals of gentle laughter to be heard on sundry occasions afterwards when the three girls were alone together. Of course there was an immense deal of kissing on the platform between them, the station-master and local porter notwithstanding; nor were the civil greetings to "Miss Eva" of those officials and the stout fellow who combined the functions of driver and conductor of the omnibus unpleasing to witness; nor those of one or two old acquaintances whom we met on our progress up Church Street — old Miss Barbour, to wit, who acknowledged to sixty, but stood recorded in the parish register as a ratepayer for fifty-five years—and young Harry Perkins, Mr Fergusson's pupil, who blushed up to the eyes as he found all escape cut off, and so came and shook hands all round.

The Miss Bartons' house was in the best and most retired street, which terminated in the churchyard, and hence derived its name. A cheerful gutter with a stream of clear water ran down beside each pave-

ment in front, and at the back was a steep garden well furnished with fruit and terminated by the willow-bordered stream. On the other bank of this was a meadow, beyond which the view was stopped by the poplars and higher walls of the mill, above which again rose the tops of the steep hills enclosing the valley. The house was an old-fashioned one of two storeys, which looked among its loftier neighbours right and left as if the builders had forgotten to pull it down when renewing the rest of the street. Right of the passage was the dining-parlour, left of it the drawing-room: the kitchen and offices projected at the back on a lower level, and looking on the garden also was the girls' schoolroom. The upper floor was more irregular, the constructor having apparently designed it on the principle that every room should be approached by a flight of steps up or down. The house had been furnished in the time of Mr Barton's childhood, and the chairs and tables partook of the spindle-like and perpendicular character affected by upholsterers fifty years ago; while time had so far left its mark on them that it was difficult to say what had been the original colour of the coverings which matched the curtains of an enormous four-post bedstead, filling up the best part of the spare room now appropriated to Eva, and last permanently occupied by the late Mrs Barton, who died about ten years after her son went to India. The drawing-room ornaments were in keeping. Con-

spicuous over the fire-place was the portrait of a certain Captain Bowyard, who, after having served for thirty years in the late East India Company's Marine, eventually obtained the distinction of a seat in the Court of Directors. This worthy, who had a high forehead, a white wig, one epaulette, and a considerable stomach, and appeared a sort of unintellectual likeness of the late Marquess Cornwallis as represented in the Council Chamber at Calcutta, was Mr Barton's great uncle, and it was to him that the latter owed his appointment to an Indian writership. Opposite this portrait was a view of the late Captain Bowyard's house in Essex, bequeathed by him to Mrs Barton, senior, with remainder to her daughters, and the rent of which, indeed, formed the major part of their proper income; a design in the Chinese school of art of a very ugly house of very red bricks and a great many very small bow-windows, approached by a circular gravel sweep surrounding a large grass plot with a rose-bush in the centre, the flowers of which were in course of being intently regarded by a gentleman in white stockings and a three-cornered hat escorting a lady with a large head of hair and a very short waist. These figures, supposed to represent the late Captain and Mrs Bowyard in the prime of their youth and beauty, were accompanied by a small terrier, standing out in one sense very black against the green grass, and in another on its hind legs, his head turned round to-

wards his master in opposition to the situation properly indicated for it by the direction of his tail, as if inviting him to a closer inspection of the rose-bush in question — which study from animal life, as Miss Barton once took occasion to observe, gave the whole scene a very natural appearance. These works of art were set off by others of a more modern character, indicating the course of the family history and the later inmates of the household. A half-figure portrait in oils of Eva's papa before he went to India: a smooth face with a vacuous smile, supported by a profusion of light hair carefully parted, brushed, and curled; a large satin scarf folded twice round the neck, showing very little shirt-collar, and fastened by a double pin and chain; a large pillar of the cyclopean order of architecture behind, bearing a red curtain not more than sixty feet high, a part of which had been drawn back to display what appeared to be an elevation of the Brighton pavilion together with a palm-tree, emblems of his future career;—the foreground consisting mainly of a very white hand turned up to show a very gold ring on the little finger. Then there was an oil-painting of Eva's four eldest sisters, done by a local artist, representing them all standing in a line gazing into the front, in red frocks, white frilled trousers, and sandals, with beautifully curled hair, the frills and buttons on the frocks especially being speaking likenesses. There were also photographic likenesses of

all the sisters taken at different times, and illustrating the advance in the photographic art; for whereas that of Mary the eldest sister was on metal, and of a sort that the portrait could only be dimly made out by standing with your nose against the wall about four feet on one side of the frame, in which position it was pronounced to be wonderfully distinct,—that of Eva, taken just before she sailed for India, was a coloured photograph done in Yewcester, and a very pretty picture of her—albeit a little stiff.

Various ornaments set off the room, proclaiming the connection of the family with India: fans of peacock-feathers, a Bombay inlaid work-box, a ditto chess-table, a ditto card-box, a Japanese cabinet, various little plaster figures of native servants, ivory bullock-carts, and little silver idols supposed to have some connection with the Brahmins, — the whole collection representing the non-edible or non-wearable contents of consignments shipped home at various times since the Misses Barton had the children under their care. They helped to set off the otherwise faded appearance of the room, which, however, did not want for evidence of feminine refinement in keeping with the character of its inmates. Miss Barton (Aunt Emily, as the girls called her) was a tall lady who looked to be about fifty, with features showing the remains of great beauty, a thin figure with a slight stoop, a low sweet voice, and a

gentle manner, while a certain nervous habit of rubbing her hands together when seated indicated a trait of character which became more plain on better acquaintance. It could indeed be seen at once that she was nervous and easily made anxious; a languid movement spoke of deficient energy; while her frail aspect and certain lines about the face gave the impression of one suffering from pain and ill health; but no complaint on that score ever escaped Aunt Emily, and her life seemed to be devoted to her charges, and her thoughts mainly concerned about them.

Miss Honoria appeared to be at least fifteen years younger than her sister, and was still very handsome. Time had not yet silvered her dark hair; and her pale clear complexion, upright carriage, and firm quick step, bespoke a sound constitution. I could not make her out at first, or discover her share in the household; but it was impossible to be with the elder Miss Barton for more than a few minutes without discovering the unselfishness of her disposition, and her refined if somewhat effeminate nature. As soon as the early tea with the solid accompaniments provided on our account was despatched, the girls went up-stairs to unpack Eva's things; and Miss Honoria going out for a solitary walk in the garden, it fell to her sister's share to entertain me in the drawing-room. We thus soon became better acquainted, and I was able to enter into the warmth of her affection for her

nieces, and to learn something of her way of looking at things. I could hardly understand, she said, the delight it was to her to see Eva again. One by one the girls went off, and then, although they heard of their marrying and settling down in homes of their own, they were such bad correspondents, dear girls, she got no particulars of their future life, except, indeed, from Mrs Barton, who wrote very regularly; and then she felt as if they were lost to her for ever, dearly as she loved them all: and now to get Eva back in this unexpected way, she could not say what a happiness it was. What she and Honoria would do when Sybil went, they could hardly bear to think; and then before long Mary Drew would be grown up and leaving them—very desolate the house would seem without the young people. At the same time I could readily understand there must have been great anxieties attached to the charge of these young girls, so pretty, too, as they all turned out; but they had been thoroughly good, and had never given a moment's trouble.

"Still, you can understand," said the gentle lady, to whom, as I judged, this burst of talking must have been an unusual feat, "our position must have been a very anxious one. Indeed, from the day dear Joseph left us, his silence caused us great anxiety, although we got accustomed to it in time as the years went on, and he never wrote; and we know that civil servants holding these high appointments must have

a great deal to occupy their time; and we used occasionally to hear about him from others who had friends in India, and that he was doing well: still, during my dear mother's last illness, it would have been a great comfort if he could have only written once or twice; and she used to inquire so anxiously if there were any letters whenever we heard that any ships had come home; but no doubt he was very busy. I believe he was a magistrate then, which no doubt in India must be a very arduous post; and when he heard of my dear mother's death he at once sent a handsome remittance. And then when he married, and his dear wife began to write to us, we felt as if our brother was restored to us; and when the children had to be sent home, and Maria (this was her sister-in-law) proposed they should be sent to us, we could not but feel what a providential thing his marriage had been." Miss Barton went on to say that she had doubts at first whether she should be justified in accepting such a responsibility, living so much out of the world as she and her sister did, and Honoria being then very young and never able to undertake much work; but Mr Fergusson (their medical man) and Miss Barbour both counselled her to do so, and certainly she had every reason to be thankful at the result. It had given them a house when they should have found it difficult to live respectably and as became officers' children, for at one time they had the lease of their house (the brick

structure in Essex already referred to) on their hands, and they could never feel sufficiently grateful for having had such dear sweet girls to bring up.

I could heartily enter into and sympathise with Miss Barton's feelings, and was able conscientiously to reply in a few suitable words about the credit attaching to herself for the admirable result of all her care; but when she apologised for her brother's neglect of his mother and sisters, on the score of his pressing official engagements, I could not help recalling to mind my father-in-law, as he used to appear after a rubber of racquets, while waiting for his turn to cut in again, smoking a number one manilla in the gallery, with his flannel-shirt rolled up to his shoulders, as probably he had been accustomed to pass a considerable part of each day for the last thirty years.

Our conversation was interrupted by the return of Eva and the girls, laden with the little gifts we had brought down with us. Even during our hurried stay at Bombay it had been found possible to lay in a small stock of the local curiosities esteemed by people in this country, and these we had supplemented by some more useful things in our London shopping, not forgetting the needs of Hannah the housemaid, and her sister Maria the cook; and surely there are few of the more obvious pleasures of life greater than is afforded by the giving a present where relationship or intimacy sanctions it, and no false ob-

ligation is involved. Then all Eva's wedding-presents had to be brought out and inspected: such a wonderful display had never been seen before by any of the admiring group, not even in the best Yewcester shops, they declared; and happily there was no one of the party to whom the display need cause a tinge of jealousy, for Sybil no doubt looked for her turn to come in due course, and Mary Drew would be an heiress. Then when the things had been sufficiently looked at and admired by all, including Hannah and Maria, and put away again—Aunt Emily's anxiety on the score of robbers being mitigated by the reflection that a gentleman would be sleeping in the house and in the same room with the treasures—we all strolled into the garden and watched the sunset, and the trout balancing themselves in the river, and an occasional water-rat taking his evening swim. I think Miss Barton's good opinion of me, which I could see stood high from the first, was a little shaken when I asked if she objected to the smell of tobacco in the open air; and I confess I should have said nothing about it, but suffered in secret, if Eva had not betrayed me by declaring that she knew I was dying for a cigar, and always smoked one in the evening—adding that her papa smoked in every room of the house, and that she herself enjoyed the smell of tobacco above everything. Thereon I accepted her aunt's assurance that it would not be disagreeable, and my long face was such a mine of respectability,

that it would easily outweigh such small confessions of vicious ways.

Then when it grew dark we returned to the drawing-room, and a tray of wine and biscuits was brought in, and Mary Drew sang a song, and then Sybil; and then, at her aunt's request, Eva, who had been sitting on a low stool by her side, fondling her hands, sang one of her old duets with Sybil — something about wandering over land and sea, the charms of my sweet Savoy to see, Fa la la la, fa la lee! Miss Barton took occasion, while I remarked on the natural beauty of both voices, to say that she had bestowed great attention on the musical education of all her nieces; for, although no musician herself, she thought music must be such a very nice thing in a hot country. She would have liked them to have a master from Yewcester, but her sister-in-law had always laid such stress on economy, and about the difficulty she and Joseph had in paying their way, that the outlay did not appear justifiable; and no doubt the expenses of so large a family must have been very heavy, and explained the irregularity that had sometimes occurred in sending home money for the children. And Leatherby was very fortunate in having so accomplished a musician in the organist of the parish church, Mr Peddell, who taught music in all its branches, including harmony and thorough-bass, and had quite a large practice in the town. And again, as Miss Barton went on to describe the

mode of education pursued, and the various little points wherein she had felt bound to practise economy, by way of saving her brother's pocket, I could not help calling to mind the light wines and general good cheer always on stock at Rhododendron Lodge, and the absence of anything like self-denial in the way of life of the good-natured man whose only economy had been practised in this vicarious fashion.

The songs over, Miss Barton, not without evident misgivings whether such a proceeding would be acceptable to a military man, especially to one belonging to the mounted branch of the service, rang for the maids to come into prayers, which she read in a gentle if somewhat feeble voice. Thus ended our first day at Leatherby: and I was able to admit unreservedly, when put to the question by Eva at a later hour, that Aunt Emily was a sweet dear; also, that Aunt Honoria was very handsome and very kind. The character of the latter lady I had not been quite able to make out, for beyond looking very handsome and amiable, and eating a hearty tea, she had taken no part in all that went on, while my efforts to open up a little independent conversation with her during the music, had broken down from want of reciprocity.

CHAPTER XI.

GLIMPSES OF A QUIET LIFE.

THE next day we had a levee of callers, including all the gentlefolk of the town, who appeared to consist for the most part of maiden ladies, and widows with grown-up daughters, an occasional gentleman being thrown in scantily here and there. Miss Barbour, the two Miss Provests, the three Miss Smiths, Mrs and the Miss Frowards, and Mrs Crane, the only one of the party in possession of a husband, and he was in India. There were also Mr and Mrs William Bowles, who lived in a house surrounded by a garden in the centre of the town, and were regarded almost county people by reason of their keeping a large yellow barouche and a couple of hunters, as indeed were his brother Mr Rupert Bowles and family, who lived in a pretty cottage just outside Squire Bamfylde's grounds. The conversation during these visits was not of the most lively character, being chiefly limited, after greetings, to inquiries whether the heat that afternoon was not quite Indian. I would fain have

followed Miss Honoria's example, and taken refuge in the shady grass plot by the river at the bottom of the garden, but was assured that my absence on this occasion would be regarded as an irreparable breach of Leatherby etiquette, so sat out the ordeal manfully. As it was, there seemed to be disappointment in some quarters that wedding-cake and wine were not served round; and by unanimous desire the wedding-presents had to be produced, the affair being generally regarded as a regular visit after the honeymoon, an occurrence too rare not to be made the most of; but it was a real pleasure to observe the kindly interest all callers took, not only in Eva herself, but also in her sisters, albeit they had evidently but the vaguest notion as to what had become of them, India being a country of mysterious import, and Mr Barton an official connected in some indeterminate way with the Hindoos. Mrs Crane, of course, took higher ground; and the Miss Frowards proved more than equal to the occasion; a certain cousin of theirs who lived in the north of England having married an officer belonging to the Hyderabad Contingent, which made them, so to speak, quite authorities on Indian subjects; and it was a disappointment to them to find that I had never met the gentleman in question and his wife, and my shortcomings in this respect appeared to throw a degree of suspicion on my antecedents. But they were all unaffectedly glad to see Eva again, although appa-

rently surprised that she was in no way changed, except being a little paler than before, and to find her dressed just like other people, only in much better taste.

Mr Harry Perkins was of course among the callers, with a high shirt-collar, hair well laid down with pomatum, and a flushed face, bringing three fine bouquets, sent by his mother, who lived at the neighbouring town of Stampton. "An offering from the maternal, ladies, who hopes to have the felicity of calling on you herself in a day or two," said the young gentleman; whereon all the girls laughed. "I suppose you are as busy as ever, Mr Harry?" observed Miss Barton, after the needful greetings had been exchanged. "Oh yes, ma'am," he replied; "the claims of science and the healing art are as strong as ever; but the governor makes over his dispensing to your humble servant, you see, and so sometimes when he is away I dispense the medicines first, and then dispense with my own services afterwards." Thereon all the girls laughed again. "And are you as fond of poetry as you used to be, Mr Harry?" asked Eva, after a while. "Well," said he, "I do find a little time now and then to cultivate the Muses; science and art, you see, ladies, sometimes go together." Which remark caused as much merriment as the foregoing ones. It was explained to me afterwards that the young gentleman was a frequent contributor to the poet's corner of both the

Stampton and Leatherby papers. Notwithstanding his vein of humour, our friend's visit might have proved a little tedious, for having found himself in a chair, he seemed quite unequal to the task of finding his way out of the room again; but happily some more visitors were announced, and under cover of the ensuing bustle he made good his flight. "What a droll boy Harry Perkins is!" said Sybil. "He is very clever," said Eva; "I am sure his verses used to be beautiful." "And so well brought up as he has been, too," added her aunt. His mother, it appeared, was the widow of a clergyman, and Harry her only child.

The pleasantest visit of the day was from Mrs Fergusson, the doctor's wife, who came with her two handsome daughters after all the other visitors had gone, and stayed a long time. These young ladies were Eva's particular friends, and prodigies of learning, as she had often told me, who, when staying with their uncle in London, always attended the School of Art at South Kensington, and Professor Waxkopf's lectures at the Royal Institution, and spent hours every day studying botany and geology, and all sorts of horrid things; although, she added, it was no wonder, their mamma and papa were both so clever and scientific. But the admiration was mutual; if Eva respected her friends' accomplishments, they loved her for her beauty, and grace, and sweet gentle manners: there was enough disparity,

in short, for mutual attachment. Mr Fergusson himself looked in later in the evening, a well-preserved middle-aged man, with a handsome determined face, who had nothing about him of the country doctor except the active habits of the class. This gentleman was evidently a sort of family guardian, who, besides his duties of medical adviser to the household, seemed to fulfil as well the functions ordinarily performed by the family lawyer and the parish clergyman. It was he who gave Miss Barton the needful advice about the investment of her little property, and, as I afterwards learnt, had arranged for the overdrawing of her account with the local bank one time when her brother's remittances were more than ordinarily in arrears. He, too, always took the steamer passage for her nieces when that periodic arrangement had to be made; and on more than one occasion, when Miss Barton's health prevented her from going, he had accompanied the young traveller to Southampton, and placed her in charge of the matron—usually some friend of Mrs Barton returning to India—who was to act as chaperone during the voyage. Miss Barton, indeed, would hardly venture on a day's excursion to Yewcester without consulting Mr Fergusson; while not the least of his services had been to teach all the girls riding. Mrs Barton, in conveying her husband's periodic exhortations to economy, had always added his injunctions that the girls should go out to India

well educated in this respect; but as Leatherby did not boast a riding-school or master of equitation, it might have been difficult to carry out his wishes but for Mr Fergusson's good-nature. Eva's graceful horsemanship was due to the teaching received while accompanying Mr Fergusson—who rode more like a dragoon than a doctor—in his visits to country patients over Yewcestershire lanes and downs; and Sybil was now going through a course in the same useful art, the moving power being a certain well-bred screw belonging to the Three Butts, and known there as the Fergusson mare, because that gentleman was accustomed to use it when his own horse wanted rest; an animal of encyclopedic accomplishments, which during the winter months was the accustomed vehicle for exhibiting the prowess of the rising Leatherby sportsmen,—young Provest from Guy's Hospital, when he came home for his Christmas holidays—young Froward the articled attorney, and occasionally Harry Perkins,—with Squire Bamfylde's hounds; and in the summer, when not wanted for jobs in harness, enjoyed the recreation of carrying one of the Miss Bartons two or three times a-week. Mary Drew, also, was now in course of acquiring the same accomplishment, her father sending in a shaggy pony from Thorpe on these occasions for her use.

Mr Fergusson, I thought, appeared a little anxious as he looked at Eva, and noticed that she was paler

and thinner than she used to be; but she explained how much she had gone through on the journey home, and that she was now rapidly getting strong again. We strolled together into the garden after a while, and he reverted to the subject, saying that he always felt somewhat anxious about all the sisters, for there were none of them really strong; but they seemed all to keep so well in India, he supposed the climate there must be suited to them. "What a happiness this must be to their aunt," said he, "to get one of her nieces back again! Each time that she has had to part with one the pang has seemed harder—it has been like giving up a child of her own; and but that resignation is the foundation of her character, I really think it would have been too much for her. What she will do when Miss Sybil goes out to India, and Mary Drew goes home for good, I hardly like to think; but perhaps it is as well in other respects that her charge should be coming to an end, and that there are no more younger sisters coming home, for her strength is not what it was; and Miss Honoria——"

He paused here, feeling probably that it did not become him to speak confidentially about any member of the family to one who might be said now to belong to it; while I, for my part, although desirous to know more, forbore for several reasons from pressing him further. In truth, I had been puzzled from the first to understand Miss Honoria's part in the little

household. Although apparently in robust health, and certainly in the enjoyment of an excellent appetite, she took no share in the care or management of the house, which appeared to be shared between her sister and Mary Drew, the latter presiding at the breakfast and tea table, and doing all the heavy carving at dinner. She went to church daily morning and evening, and when not so employed or at meals, her time seemed to be spent in walking up and down the path at the bottom of the garden. When in the house she occupied herself in plain needlework, and rarely spoke unless addressed, but she was more often in her own room than sitting with the others. Withal she seemed quite rational, as well as thoroughly amiable. Both the girls and her sister accepted the state of things as a matter of course; and to the latter she appeared as much an object of regard and care as if she had been the most useful member of the household.

Of course we had to see the local sights, or rather I accompanied Sybil and Mary Drew on a tour to see them, for Miss Barton was not equal to much walking, and seldom went further than to the almshouses at the end of the street, where she read twice a-week to some old women, and Eva stayed at home on this occasion to keep her aunt company. Thus we went over the church ("I don't know much about the architecture of it," said Miss Barton, "but I believe it is very much admired as something quite Gothic"), a

roomy, ill-kept structure, much damaged by restorations a hundred years before; the grammar school, where the boys of the town appeared to receive an inferior education at a very low price, and where the initials were pointed out to us carved on one of the forms, of one John Tully, who, having gone up quite a poor boy to try his fortune in London, eventually became Lord Mayor thereof; also a similar autograph wood-engraving of another distinguished townsman who served as a lieutenant in the fleet at Trafalgar. Then we climbed up the hill above the Bamfylde woods, to look from the celebrated view over the town, and descending again went some way along the river to see the celebrated view of the hills from below, which Deedes, R.A., a connection of the Provests, was reported to have said, when he paid them a visit a few years ago, reminded him of the Trossachs. And of course we went over the factory, as well as the schools connected therewith, and the mechanics' reading-room, "erected by John Sheepshanks, Esquire, proprietor of the mill, and M.P. for the borough." It was a very happy quiet week this; and the rest, and the society of her aunt and the girls were evidently agreeing better with Eva than the restless noisy life of a big London hotel. A general holiday was of course proclaimed on such an occasion, which meant that the morning visits were suspended of little Mr Abel, the writing and arithmetic master. Sybil appeared to have got as far as

compound addition, an odious thing, she said ; but Mary Drew, who Eva had told me beforehand was awfully clever, was deep in the mysteries of decimals, and made light of fractions. Also were suspended the bi-weekly lessons of Miss Jones, the French governess—"Mademoiselle" as she was called—who, having been English governess for a season at a *pension* in Paris, was regarded throughout Leatherby as an infallible authority on French politics, and the only person qualified to see through the real designs of the Commune. The saturnalia occasioned by our visit included also the discontinuance of the evening readings in history—six pages of Hume read aloud in alternate pages by the two girls, while Miss Barton sat listening and gently rubbing her hands, and Miss Honoria was engaged silently on some article of plain work—fearfully dry stuff, Eva had styled this same improving study, when describing to me beforehand the mode of life at Leatherby. The schoolroom was used, however, by the younger members of the party to sit in of a morning, while Miss Honoria was at church and Miss Emily engaged on household duties ; and little peals of innocent laughter often issued from it as I wrote letters or read the papers in the drawing-room, the silence of the place otherwise unbroken, save when about eleven o'clock every day Mr Sheepshanks passed by on his way to the mill, sitting upright in his one-horse barouche, with a benevolent smile on his face and a snuff-box

in his hand; or when the empty omnibus from the Three Butts would make its periodic circuit of the town in search of passengers for the trains, who never appeared. There was one black afternoon when the visits had to be returned, but we refused all invitations except one to tea with the Fergussons, and another to be mentioned presently. "I make no apology for our simple habits," said the mistress of the house, as we sat down to the well-covered table; "for Eva knows our ways so well that the pretension of a heavy dinner would not impose on you. We could never have brought up our family properly if we had not renounced all needless waste in eating and drinking from the first; and Mr Fergusson can never be sure of sitting out a meal, however simple." And indeed Mr Fergusson was absent on this occasion, only coming in just as everybody else had finished, and even then a little girl was reported to have arrived in the surgery with the intelligence that her still smaller sister had "scalded of herself." However, Robert, the eldest son (house-surgeon of St Brice's, but just now at home on leave), was deputed to act while his father took supper in peace. "I always maintain," said Mr Fergusson, while drinking his third cup of tea, "in opposition to the popular notions of the day, professional and otherwise, that wine is not necessary for health. Except mamma there, not one of us takes wine, and very few of us even beer, and the plan has agreed with us all."

And certainly when I looked round the table I could not help thinking that if Eva and Sybil were left out, and perhaps young Perkins the pupil, who had not been brought up in the house, we should average eleven stone at the least. "But then," continued Mr Fergusson, "we country doctors are not supposed to know anything about these things. We regard each specimen of humanity as a whole, and so are incapacitated from forming sound opinions. To do that, you must lay yourself out for some specialty. Spend your life in a consulting practice devoted to complaints of the fifth rib, or the great toe, and you are entitled to be deemed a philosopher. A very pretty theory if the fifth rib or the great toe were a distinct autonomy, with behaviour apart from the remainder of the body, but as things go actually, hardly consistent with fact."

This remark was made as we strolled through the doctor's garden, his special hobby, where a goodly show of fruit was garnished with a still more brilliant display of flowers, and the tasteful arrangement of creepers and evergreens made it truly a *rus in urbe*, for the house was in the centre of the town, and the garden was surrounded on all sides by walls and houses.

There was now a general demand for music, and although the summer air was tempting outside, the party repaired indoors. The whole Fergusson family were musical, and sang duets, trios, and quartets in

excellent style; but they were still greater at instrumental music, and made up quite an orchestra, Mrs and Miss Fergusson at the piano, Miss Kate at the harp, Robert first violin, the second ditto being taken by Reginald the Cambridge freshman (foundation exhibitioner at Mary-Anne Hall from the Leatherby grammar-school, an honour carried off after severe competition with the three other prefects in the sixth form), while Mr Fergusson played the violoncello. "Everlasting classical music, and dry stuff of that sort," said Sybil, as we walked home afterwards; "Beethoven six nights in the week, and Mendelssohn the seventh."

"I hope we shall not bore you awfully, Captain West," said Miss Kate, as the party were engaged in tuning up their instruments preparatory to the first piece; "but music is the one thing as to which we always say your wife is not perfect."

"Of course I like classical music," rejoined Eva, thus attacked; "and I should like nothing better than to play it, if it wasn't so horribly difficult."

"As if you could not play that or anything else you liked, dear," replied the other, "if you only tried. I assure you, Captain West, we none of us are fit to do more than work the bellows, if Eva played the organ; and as for difficulty, these things are nothing to her fantasia and variations by Herr Skratzky; but I needn't tell *you* what a touch Eva has, all thrown away owing to that horrid Mr Peddell."

And then the music began. Young Perkins was the only member of the family who could not take a part, and he remained silent throughout the evening, for at the sound of his voice, on his attempting some sniggering whispers intended for Sybil's ear, young Robert Fergusson, who was just coming to that celebrated passage (movement in D) for the first violin, and who being a full surgeon naturally regarded a pupil as something to be snubbed on every occasion, looked round so angrily that the youngster was effectually silenced. Why he did not pursue the natural course of falling in love with his master's daughters I cannot say; but it had been his fate apparently to cherish a hopeless attachment to each of the Miss Bartons in turn, beginning with Mary when she was only six years older than himself, and so on down to Sybil, who was now in course unconsciously of kindling the warmest sentiments of his heart. And as the young fellow sat in a corner, his usually perky features assuming for the nonce a somewhat melancholy aspect, it was easy to fancy him, under the influence of the music, building castles in the air on a foundation of Beethoven: an appointment to the Bengal medical establishment, followed by an early meeting with Sybil's parents, who spurn the young unknown assistant surgeon with contumely; how his surpassing merits would soon be recognised and rewarded by a confidential post on the Governor-General's staff; and how, summoned to attend Sybil

in a desperate Indian fever, he succeeds in recovering her after she had been given over by three of the most eminent local physicians; how, finally, when brought to see his worth and talent, in a transport of emotion she gives him her hand, the grateful parents assenting to and blessing the union. And in truth Sybil was pretty enough to turn any young fellow's head.

"I have often regretted," said Mr Fergusson later in the evening, as we partook of refreshments preparatory to departure, "that I did not succeed in persuading Miss Barton to employ Dr Phewgew of Yewcester to teach her nieces music, for old Peddell, our organist, although a worthy soul, is not much of a musician, as you will be able to discover on Sunday; but she did not feel at liberty to incur the expense and so I did not press the point."

CHAPTER XII.

LOCAL POLITICS.

THE other visit we paid was to Thorpe, Mr—or, as all the people in those parts called him, Squire—Drew's place, that gentleman having ridden in and given us a pressing invitation to go out and see his grounds. Mr Drew was a widower, who, finding the care of a young girl rather a difficult and troublesome office, had obtained the consent of Miss Barton, a distant connection of his wife, to take charge of her; Mary Drew had accordingly been an inmate of Aunt Emily's household for the last eight years, and it was understood would remain there for another year, or perhaps two, until she was grown up; her father, in the mean time—a shrewd, well-educated, but shy man—occupying himself mainly in hunting, shooting, the growing of turnips, and the miscellaneous business of a county magistrate. As he was reputed to be worth five thousand a-year and to spend about one, it was expected that his daughter would be a great heiress. Mary was cast in a somewhat

more robust mould than her young companions, but although not so pretty as them, she was handsome enough, with a bright face expressing both intellect and character: while she could not have lived so long with Aunt Emily, as she always called Miss Barton, without acquiring her habit of refined and gentle manners.

We drove out in the afternoon in an open fly hired from the Three Butts, the unfortunate Fergusson mare being ignobly yoked for the occasion to a less high bred but equally gummy companion. The party consisted of Mary Drew, Sybil, Eva, and myself; Aunt Emily excused herself from the exertion, and Aunt Honoria could not come, as the excursion would have interfered with afternoon service. The road lay up the narrow valley of the Yew, with hills clothed in splendid woods on either side. We passed one or two pretty country seats, Mr Sheepshanks's modest villa among them, lying low down on the borders of the river, before we came to Squire Drew's, situated at the head of a little valley which ran down at right angles to the main one, on the border-land between the woods and the moors above, cleverly placed so as to command the smallest possible view —a white-plastered, comfortable, ugly house, under the porch of which the Squire, stooping slightly, as was his wont, and with his spectacles on, stood waiting to receive us. The interior of the house corresponded with the appearance of the outside, and was

probably just as the late Mrs Drew had left it. A drawing-room evidently disused, and the anteroom, gave evidence of a taste in art, and the things we saw had been collected by the Squire when travelling abroad twenty years before. But his art education had become stereotyped at this point, or the love of money had intervened to stop the process of collecting, for there was nothing visible in the way of ornament or books of a later date; and the rooms which appeared to be tenanted bespoke the ordinary country gentleman with a taste for field-sports.

However, we were not long in the house, for, on our refusing the refreshments offered, the Squire led us out to see the place. The ornamentation of the grounds had still to be carried out, the drive up to the house being little different from a common field —and there was no flower-garden to speak of, or anything which offered the opportunity for complimenting the proprietor; while it was curious to observe Mary Drew walking like a stranger about her father's grounds, or looking at the rooms of a house in which she could not remember ever having slept. Almost immediately behind the house we came on the coverts, plentifully tenanted by pheasants with their young broods, and their feeding-troughs guarded by chained dogs; and then we passed through some fields farmed by the Squire himself. The most striking thing at first about the estate was the dilapidated condition of the labourers' thatched cottages; and I took occa-

sion to observe that they looked to be more picturesque than comfortable. They cost a lot of money to keep up, however, did those cottages, said Mr Drew. I thereon inquired how wages stood in these parts, and was told that they were fairly satisfactory—generally about nine or ten shillings a-week, and seldom so high as eleven shillings. "You see, if we take a man on in the spring we promise him a bonus of ten or fifteen shillings after the harvest, and that keeps the hands with you right through the season. Otherwise they would be off all over the country in mowing and reaping times. But rates are high, very high; in the winter especially, if it comes a frost, the Stampton Union is crowded."

The conversation which followed, about the poor-rates and the general difficulty farmers and landlords found in paying their way, was however interrupted as we reached the edge of the cultivated table-land and entered on the wooded side of the hill overlooking the main valley and river. Here the narrow path and the beauty of the scene were alike sufficient to extinguish any desire for a discussion on the dismal science; and when we reached a small plateau whereon stood a summer-house, the view was beautiful enough to attract the attention of the most indifferent. The woods extended straight down to the river about two hundred feet below us, the red bank and white shingle bed of which set off the bright green of the strips of meadow-land, dotted with noble elms, which

bordered the little stream on one side or the other, as it meandered to and fro; while opposite us, and rising to the same height, were hills also wooded, and in the full splendour of summer foliage. A few cows feeding in the meadows, a fly-fisher pursuing his sport, a cart slowly crossing the bridge over the stream below, the smoke from a cottage, were, save the birds singing in the trees, the only objects in movement; the scene was redolent of the quiet sweetness of sylvan beauty only to be found in England; while the surroundings were suggestive of that happy state of life where pheasants are abundant and wages stand at nine shillings a-week.

But such reflections hardly found time for expression in view of the cheerful bustle of the immediate foreground. A gamekeeper had already lighted a wood-fire beside the summer-house, and was engaged in spreading on the table the contents of a hamper which a lad had brought down from the house. Trout-salad, chicken and tongue, syllabub, late strawberries and cream, with cakes and tartines, formed our repast. Tea and coffee were prepared by Mary Drew, while various wines and some wonderful Yewcestershire cider were provided for those who preferred stronger drink. Some of this last-named fluid, I was informed, had been drunk at the Stampton Conservative banquet two years before, and was pronounced by the local paper to be equal to superior champagne; and, apart from comparisons, it was

certainly a most excellent beverage, although possibly suggestive of gout. Our little feast, in such scenery, on a lovely summer evening, could not fail to go off well; and the pleasure of the picnic was much enhanced by the timely arrival of Mr Fergusson and his second daughter. He had taken advantage of a professional visit in the neighbourhood to drive her out; and, putting up his horse and gig at the little farm below, he and the young lady climbed up the wood; and the party being simultaneously completed by the addition of a neighbouring squire who joined us at this rendezvous, we sat down on the benches of the summer-house to our meal.

This concluded, the young ladies set about collecting wild-flowers; while Mr Drew, producing some very tolerable cigars—the wreck of his property, apparently, after the poor-rates had been paid—the men, more lazily disposed, arranged themselves for a quiet smoke on the grassy bank.

"Well," said I, "when that redistribution of property takes place among our citizens which the prophets foretell, I think this is the particular bit which I should like to have registered in my name. With a neat little four-roomed cottage on this plateau, a fly-rod, and the run of these woods in October, a republic under those conditions would not be such a bad thing after all."

"Ah! those days are coming, and sooner than people think," said Fergusson, with a sigh; "the

only difference is that there will be no property left to divide." And the prosperous doctor, as he said this, took a melancholy pull at his havannah, as if he would at least finish that before the evil time arrived.

"At any rate," added Drew, "there will be such a lot of people to cut in for shares, that no one will be left with a bit of land bigger than what we are now sitting on." And the Squire threw a glance over the visible portion of his property up and down the valley, as though taking a farewell view of it before the preliminary staking out of lots commenced.

"Yes," continued Fergusson, "we are going ahead at a tremendous rate. The Irish Church destroyed; university tests abolished; purchase done away in the army; the House of Lords tottering; and now the Land Reform League and Republican Society are beginning their machinations, and they won't be easily satisfied."

"Yes indeed," chimed in the Squire, "Mr Merrifield has found it very easy to set the stone a-rolling, but it will puzzle him or anybody else to stop it."

Then both speakers relapsed into silence, puffing their cigars moodily, as if awaiting in despair the impending final crash of the avalanche.

"I infer from these remarks," said I, after a pause, "that I have the honour of being in the society of two Tories. This is quite an agreeable surprise, for

I had been led to suppose that the genus was extinct."

"It will very soon be so," said Drew. "When men who have been brought up in sound principles and ought to know better, go over to the enemy's camp, what can you expect from those who have never been taught what is right, and who have nothing to lose by change and revolution?"

This was evidently meant for a hit at his brother squire, a stout hale man about twice Drew's weight, who, as he smiled good-humouredly at the attack, looked the very personification of substantial prosperity.

"Yes," added Fergusson; "but our friend here has merely followed the bad example set him. It is Strickland's defection that has broken up the county and made political consistency a byword."

Then it was explained to me how Mr Strickland, the greatest landed proprietor, and the head of the oldest family in the county, who had represented it for thirty years in the Conservative interest, had lately changed sides and voted for the disestablishment of the Irish Church and the abolition of university tests, and how it was understood Mr Merrifield was going to raise him to the peerage as a reward for his tergiversation.

"But I thought," said Drew, "you at least, Captain West, as a military man, would be a Conservative. Is it possible," he added, with a shrewd smile, "that

these levelling doctrines can have permeated the army? Surely, now, you can't approve of the abolition of purchase?"

"Well, considering that we have got along for the last hundred years in my regiment without purchase, I don't suppose its abolition is likely to have a very disastrous effect upon us. But I claim to be a Conservative in the fullest sense of the term, at least if I understand what the name means. It is only, I suppose, an out and out Tory of the most bigoted school who would want to conserve everything, good or bad. A reasonable Conservative, it may be assumed, only wants to preserve what is good, and is ready to improve what is bad. I am quite prepared to be judged by that canon."

"I fear it is only too true," said Fergusson, "that Captain West is but a Radical in disguise. Another poor erring brother, Morton, come to join your sheepfold."

But our discussion was interrupted at this point by the return of the young ladies laden with ferns and flowers; and the shaggy pony also having arrived for Eva to ride upon, with a shawl for a habit, we returned towards the house.

"He is a shrewd fellow, is our host," said Fergusson, as we were wending our way in Indian file along the narrow path from the summer-house—"and, as you may have inferred from his conversation, a man of sound political opinions. He ought to be in

Parliament, and I hope we shall get him in some day."

"Why, I thought your party were at a complete discount in these regions. Surely Leatherby is Liberal to the backbone? They tell me that the last election was not even contested."

"No more it was, but then you may put that down to personal considerations. Mr Sheepshanks is everything to the town, and many people would stand by him who belong to the opposite side—certainly I should be very sorry to vote against him myself; and although Lord Wraymouth doesn't do much for the place directly, still he is in the Government and has helped on a good many of the townsfolk. But now all that sort of thing has come to an end with these competitive examinations, and I expect at the next election he will have to fight for his seat."

"What! even with Mr Sheepshanks to back him, and the tenants of all those neat cottages in the lower town sure to vote for him?"

"Well, I don't know exactly about Lord Wraymouth, because he has been our member for so long, and we are all creatures of habit; but Lord Wraymouth may be called up to the House of Lords any day, for old Lord Stowe must be close upon ninety, and we certainly shouldn't allow a new man to be brought in without a struggle. Besides, the present state of things can't last for ever. Mr Sheepshanks is an old man himself, and his grandson is a young

boy at school, and there might be time before he could fill Mr Sheepshanks's place to establish the Conservative interests on a strong basis."

"But is not all this rather a looking a-head into the days of the republic, when there will be no squires left to stand for counties or boroughs either, and the possession of property of any sort will be a disqualification for becoming a representative of the people?"

"True," said the doctor, laughing, "there is no saying how soon these evil days may be upon us, and the prospect gives me the only sleepless nights I ever have had; but it is to be hoped the Conservative party will give a kick or two before it is finally trampled out."

"Well, but I suppose you hardly expect, amid your gloomy forebodings, that the principle of hereditary legislators will last as long as the respected Mr Sheepshanks. Does not the prospect of Lord Wraymouth coming down as the Earl of Stowe, with money in both pockets, to claim the suffrages of his old friends for a continuance of his seat in the Lower House, disturb your slumbers sometimes? However, at any rate, you have one consolation. Whatever happens, the inhabitants of these meadow-lands are like to go on suffering from the rheumatics to the end of the chapter, and I should think not even a political millennium will clear the low-lying lanes of Leatherby from occasional typhus. That must be an

abiding consolation to gentlemen of your profession, doctor. We poor soldiers may have our occupation stopped any day, but your fraternity will be allowed to go on killing people to the end of the chapter."

"Yes, but then by that time the citizens will expect to be attended for nothing, or else there will be a general participation of profits, the result being a very unfair day's wages for a fair day's work, which won't leave life worth having, or, at any rate, worth taking."

"If it's not an improper question, I should like to ask how far you carry politics into your professional practice, Mr Fergusson? Do you attend only those patients whose principles are of the right sort, or do you sink these little differences in the face of illness?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I doubt if many of my patients know that I have any political opinions, and I am sure I very often know nothing about theirs. You must not suppose that I speak as openly to everybody as I have done to you, but I have known your wife and her sisters so many years, and they are so intimate with my girls, that I feel that I am speaking as to an old friend. And, oddly enough, I took it for granted that you must be on the right side. But in fact we have had no politics here since I have been settled in the place, and I don't suppose we shall have as long as Mr Sheepshanks lives."

At this point we reached the top of the woods, and were able to join in the general conversation as we returned to the house; and declining the Squire's offer of further refreshments, Mr Fergusson and his daughter mounted the gig, and the rest of us took our seats in the fly, and were drawn back to Leatherby in the summer twilight, by the Fergusson mare and her stable companion.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH NO PROGRESS IS MADE.

BUT although our visit to Leatherby was passed thus agreeably, and it was a real happiness to witness Eva's delight at being with her aunt and sister again, and still more to notice the gain in strength due to our quiet life, I was consumed myself all the time by an inward restlessness in utter contrast to the peaceful surroundings of the scene. As for news, Miss Barton took in the Stampton weekly paper as well as the Leatherby Express, a very large sheet made up of a great many extracts in very small type, not a very clever paper Miss Barton said she was told, but which she thought it proper to subcribe to as an encouragement to local enterprise, although no one in the house appeared to read either of them; and I took the liberty of supplementing the supply with the London dailies, and watched eagerly the progress of the session. At times it appeared as if I should be altogether too late in my errand—evidently destined to be a fool's errand, so

comprehensive was the Government scheme, so sensibly would the Ministers express themselves about the great question. And when the *Dial* threw out suggestive feelers to the effect that enough had been done already in the way of reform and organisation, while the *Daily Eclectic* pronounced the same opinion quite decidedly, my expectations fell to zero. I had evidently risked my wife's life for nothing. But then perhaps the next day, on the first breath of opposition, a Minister would signify that this point or that would not be insisted on, and that the whole plan was an open question subject to any degree of modification; that in short the Government scheme meant everything or nothing, according to the amount of squeezing applied; or another Minister would make some fatuous remark showing that he had not mastered the first elements of his case, and did not in the least understand what he was talking about; or Mr Merrifield would take occasion to throw out some disparaging hint signifying that he disliked and disbelieved in the whole business, and that the Secretary of State for War should not set the country on fire for want of cold water thrown upon it by his chief: coming across such extracts as these, and turning to the *Unicorn*, which did not fail to denounce Mr Merrifield and the whole Cabinet every day as ignorant impostors, only fit to meddle and muddle; reading these inspiriting opinions, and the savage attacks made almost every evening in the

Piccadilly, I could discern a glimmer of hope that this part of the business of the country was not likely after all to be settled out of hand.

But in the mean time no advance was being made towards building my Spanish castle, even so much as laying in the needful bricks and mortar. Here was nearly a fortnight gone, and absolutely nothing done, and the feeling that time was thus slipping away grew daily more irritating and perplexing, to say nothing of the absurdity of coming all this way in such a hurry merely to dawdle at the end. It was therefore with a sense of relief that I heard one morning from Mr Roberts that my presence in town was needed for a decision regarding the sale of some South American stock, and other matters of the sort, which afforded an excuse for bringing our visit to an end.

Sybil was allowed to return with us to town, her aunt having got over the objection felt at first to intrusting her to the care of a military man. The fact was Miss Barton's idea of the profession appeared to have been mainly derived from a certain Captain Brawn, a half-pay officer, and the only representative of it residing in Leatherby, a burly-looking ruffian, who seldom appeared in public except on Sundays, when he scowled down on the other residents during morning service from a pew in the gallery; who was reputed to beat his wife, and certainly beat his two sons, those unfortunate lads frequently turning up at the grammar school with black eyes and other

bruises not earned in conflict with their playfellows. The eminent respectability of my long face, which not even the dissipation of an afternoon cigar could abate, had effectually overcome the natural misgivings of the gentle lady about intrusting her precious charge to our care; and we left accordingly for town one fine morning with Sibyl, our party being further supplemented by a little maid, orphan niece to Hannah and Maria, who had served an apprenticeship in waiting and needlework in Squire Bamfylde's family, and who, much to her relatives' delight, now entered into our service as body attendant to Eva. It was a mournful day in the little house, for the numerous partings Miss Barton had gone through with her nieces did not make them more easy to bear, and Mary Drew, who had never been without a companion since she entered it, was especially disconsolate.

Our party being now too large to admit of our fulfilling the engagement to stay with Mr Paterson, we returned at first to the hotel; but that gentleman declaring that there was abundant room for all, and making a very strong point of the matter, we moved into Sackville Street almost immediately. And indeed this caravanserai was not a suitable place for us; the care of these young girls involved perpetual attendance upon them, and the most careful escort could not secure them from the ill-manners of insolent starers in the lobbies, while Annette—Eva's

little maid—seemed frightened out of her wits by the noise and publicity and the free-and-easy ways of the servants' hall. So as Mr Paterson would take no denial, I gladly accepted his hospitality.

Our host lived in Sackville Street, because he said he liked the quietude and fresh air of that part of the town after the bustle of the city. At any rate there could hardly have been a more convenient locality for young people paying a first visit to town, and who now addressed themselves seriously to the business of sight-seeing; flower-shows, concerts, morning and evening; the Crystal Palace of course; the Royal Academy; the exhibition of the old masters, which both Eva and Sybil pronounced stupid. Some days, instead of sight-seeing, we would sally forth for a ride in the Row, on very presentable hacks hired for the occasion, and I don't know which of us enjoyed it more, the girls or their escort, for in truth I felt on all these occasions that after all there was no prettier exhibition in London. We seldom saw our host before dinner-time, at least the young ladies did not, for they were never down in time for his early breakfast, and of course they did not accompany me in my occasional visits citywards, where the business of scheduling went slowly on, Mr Paterson appearing not the least in a hurry to adjust the estate; and in the evening we were seldom alone for a continuous stream of guests joined the dinner-party — Scotch clients, English clients, sometimes

even Irish clients, who had come to town on business, filling day after day the little dining-room in Sackville Street, till between the steamy odours of viands in the warm summer evening and the crowd of white-waistcoated officials, there seemed often to be hardly breathing-room. Very long were the repasts, but not a bit too long for our host, who sat at the head of the table, smiling pleasantly, and happily unconscious that it was possible to feel bored on such occasions. His pleasure in life indeed appeared to be to accumulate clients for himself, or at any rate work for Herries and Crouch to do, and to pay back the former in hospitality when they came to town. The after-dinner times were somewhat trying too, especially if any ladies were among the party, there being no specific hostess to act as stage-manager: happily the long dinner made the rest of the evening short, and the awkwardness was often relieved by the presence of the young lady from the Royal Academy, who sang with a voice fit to bring the walls down, and caused quite a little crowd to assemble in the street below the open window. On nights when there were no visitors we used to go to the opera, or sometimes, as Mr Paterson was always pleased to act as escort, I deserted them for the House of Commons, for which special orders were always obtainable through his kindness, and sat steadily through the debates, interesting or otherwise, watching the forms of procedure and trying to

discover why the bores were so patiently listened to. Mr Paterson got orders also for the girls to the ladies' gallery one evening, and it promised to be an interesting occasion, as both Mr Braham and Mr Merrifield were expected to speak; but we had not been there long when I perceived from the opposite gallery their signal for retreat, and rejoined them in the lobby.

"Such a dreadful place to be boxed up in!" said Eva, next morning at breakfast.

"And then only think to have to listen to those dismal creatures down below," added Sybil, who had begun to find a voice sometimes even when I was present.

"Yes," said Eva; "only fancy choosing to go there night after night when they might be going to the opera or to dances. How anybody who is not obliged can lead such a life——"

Here the speaker stopped and blushed, for I had confided to her my desire to become a member of that august assembly; but I laughed away the fears she expressed afterwards when we were alone lest she should have wounded my feelings; she must have found out by this time, I said, that her old husband belonged to the stupid people whose tastes lay in the direction of dismal pursuits.

Then there was a Woolwich ball to which we all went, for by this time various regimental friends had begun to find us out. Brooke and Winchester, who

were stationed there, insisted on our going down to dress and stay over the night, and turned out of their quarters, which they fitted up quite sumptuously for the reception of the young ladies, with cheval glasses and toilet-tables which the foolish young fellows had evidently hired for the occasion from town regardless of expense. The girls were delighted with their apartments, and with the sergeant's wife who was engaged to wait upon them, and our hosts appeared equally pleased with their company. The ball was pronounced perfect, and as Sybil had never been to one of any kind before, she was properly impressed with the splendour of the occasion; while even Eva, who had gone through two seasons of continuous dancing, had never seen anything like it. "The Sirmoori balls were very nice," she said; "but all the officers used to wear black coats—so stupid of them. Only fancy, Captain Gray, I have only seen Charlie twice in his uniform; he might almost just as well not be in the army at all. Even when there were full-dress balls he used always to stay away. He hates balls and things of that sort, and would rather be reading some stupid book any day,—would'nt you, Charlie? He looks awfully bored now, doesn't he?" These remarks, which may possibly have been suggested by my lanky face in a fit of absence assuming an unusually lugubrious expression, were uttered while we were assembled in Captain Gray's quarters preparatory to a descent of the

whole party to the mess-room; but indeed one must have been a very misanthrope not to appreciate the scene and the value of our contribution to it. Of course the girls enjoyed it, especially when at about one o'clock it became possible to dance, and it was sufficient pleasure to witness their happiness, and the admiration they excited: it was broad daylight before we returned to our rooms.

The ball was followed by a breakfast party in barracks, when various officers' wives were invited, after which it was proposed to go over the Arsenal, one of our hosts holding an appointment in that establishment. Eva declared she would like to see the Arsenal of all things, but in fact she could hardly stand for fatigue, and was fain obliged to accept the offer of a drive in a pony-carriage with one of the ladies to see the Academy and Shooters Hill, while Sybil and one or two unconquerable spirits joined the party of sight-seers. We should all have been glad of pony-carriages before the day was over, for our guide was one of those excellent fellows who suppose you must be as interested in their business as they are themselves, and would not allow us to pass by anything; the result was that Sybil was soon reduced to the same state of prostration as her sister, and the two returned to town in the evening half-dead with fatigue, and scarcely able to exchange compliments with our kind young hosts, who insisted on coming down to the railway station to see us off.

CHAPTER XIV.

I MAKE A CONFESSION.

NEXT day was perforce spent by the sisters resting in Sackville Street, from sheer inability of either to do anything else, and as London was now getting very hot and stuffy, we were all glad that the following day was that appointed for our visit to Mrs Herries; the fresh air and quiet of Bushey Heath formed a grateful change, and there was some chance of Eva getting the rest there which it seemed impossible to insist on while in town.

Mrs Herries, in the absence of any family distractions, occupied herself with the cares of lap-dogs, ducks of strange plumage, and geraniums. Mr Herries devoted such time as he could snatch from business engagements, and travelling up and down by the Liverpool night mail, which seemed to be his principal employment, to the encouragement of the fine arts as developed in the English school of water-colour painters; and the walls of all the rooms in the comfortable old-fashioned brick house were cover-

ed with various specimens of their skill, remarkable for their originality and diversity of treatment. Teddington Lock, by Jerky Coster, a composition consisting of willows, weeds, and water, with a foreground of three ducks and a little girl in a pinafore with blue spots. "Coster's best manner," said Herries, as he took me round the rooms; "I'll back Coster to paint a duck and green weeds against any man in England." Shepperton Lock, by the same artist, a composition also made up of willows, weeds, and water, with a foreground of four ducks and a little girl in a pinafore with pink spots. The Lago Maggiore from the south, by Joe Botham; a very snowy mountain, a very blue sky, a still bluer lake, with a red road in the right foreground set off by a green vine trailing over a pillar, and a brown peasant woman with a white head-dress picked out in body-colour. Lago Maggiore from the east, by the same artist; another blue sky, white mountain, and blue lake, with a red road in the left foreground, also set off by a green vine trailing over a pillar and a brown peasant woman with a white head-dress in body-colour. "Wonderful clean colourist Joe Botham is," said Herries, as we surveyed these works of art together; "and they say he has never been to Italy, which makes his painting all the more extraordinary." Then there was a "View of Harborough from the sea," by George Sparrow, junior; a brig going over the bar, with a background of very yellow sand,

and a cliff with very distinct stratification standing out against a lake and indigo sky. "View of Riley from the sea," by the same artist; the same brig going over the same bar, also with a background of very yellow sand and cliff; remarkable similarity between the geology of Riley and that of Harborough. "He's a very clean colourist too, is young Sparrow," said my host; "in fact, I really don't know which is the cleaner of the two;" and certainly the appearance of the yellow sands quite bore out this criticism.

But my mind just now was too much engrossed with another subject to admit of its being properly susceptible to the elevating influence of these works of art. As the days went on, bringing me no nearer to the accomplishment of the object my heart was set on, I felt as if possessed with a demon of restless dissatisfaction, till it became utterly impossible to take real interest in anything that was going on around me. Few people will be able to enter into this feeling, because few probably have experienced it in the same intensity; but the lover who sees the precious moments given him in the society of his mistress passing away, and his cause from pique or obstinacy or blundering making no progress; or a mother who, when she would devote to the dear child about to leave her the last hours before parting, finds them absorbed in the paltry distractions of everyday life; or the professional man growing grey while he

eats his heart away with vexation for want of the opportunity which never comes;—those who have undergone experiences of this kind may appreciate my feelings. Withal I could not but be amused at the incongruity of my outward appearance and inward desires; apparently bent only on amusement, and that under the most agreeable auspices—escort to two of the prettiest girls in London, fresh and unsophisticated enough to enjoy these simple pleasures with unalloyed delight—yet all the while consumed by this restless desire to be up and at work. Still more absurd was the contrast between the greatness of my ambition and the selfish recklessness with which I set off to pursue it, and the perfect impotence of the sequel. Here was a man who aspired to a great mission, whose thoughts, sleeping and waking, were absorbed in his intended task, and yet who had not the moral courage and common-sense sufficient to set about accomplishing the first simple step! No one in fact could have been more impressed than I was myself with the absurdity of my position; the ridiculous contrast between the magnitude of my aspirations and the impotence of my behaviour. The fact is, I did not know how to set about making a beginning. To do this involved taking some one into confidence, and I shrank from the ridicule such a confession of my aspirations might evoke. Yet without the aid of some friend there seemed no way of making a start. I had heard or read, indeed, of

Parliamentary agents, personages who arranged the representation of the country by some mysterious procedure, working in league with the political organisation known as "the clubs;" men who registered, ticketed off in their memory, the representative feeling of every constituency in the kingdom, and kept lists in their note-books of the approved candidates to be distributed among them, and the charges to be incurred by each; men without whose aid and support it would be useless to come forward for any borough, large or small. But although I had heard there were such people, and to a certain extent believed in their existence, I did not expect to find the names of any of these gentlemen in the London Directory, and I felt too shy to make inquiries about them. The natural course would of course have been to consult my kind-hearted and shrewd old lawyer; but whether it was that his clients were all exceptionally stupid people, or that he supposed a military man by reason of his profession must necessarily be incompetent to understand business matters, Mr Paterson had a way of going down to first principles whenever he touched upon such things by no means flattering to one's self-esteem—as, for example, a brief disquisition on the nature of consols, and a statement of the fact that a thousand pounds invested in the three per cents would produce more than three per cent; also that when you made a payment it was a good plan to take a receipt; and further, that the Court of Pro-

bate was an institution established by law whose requirements must not be evaded, and so forth. I had a sort of feeling, therefore, that if I made known my wish to Mr Paterson he would be disposed to regard is as more of a fancy than a serious purpose—a suspicion, moreover, that he would probably carry on any electioneering business in the same leisurely way that he set about scheduling the estate, which would be fatal to my hopes of a speedy consummation; and thus I had somehow always stopped short when on the point of speaking about the matter. But I confess that when returning from my numerous visits to his office in Gracechurch Street, I had more than once taken a route homewards by Chancery Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields, and other localities affected by lawyers, wondering which of the names painted on the doors belonged to the powerful being whose agency was necessary to open the magic portals.

However, there must evidently be a limit to this ridiculous state of bashfulness, and I determined to unbosom myself to Herries. Herries I fancied would be more sympathetic in such a matter, at any rate would enter readily into my ideas, while it was easy to see that he would be more prompt to act if action were needed. His restless dark eyes betokened a man of action, and indeed half his time seemed to go in rushing about the country on mysterious errands. Herries evidently was the man to apply to. And an opportunity occurred immediately on our going down

to Bushey. Our dinner-party the first evening comprised in addition to ourselves only Mr Crouch and the young lady from the Royal Academy. Crouch was much younger than either of his partners, a man good-looking enough, but with a mean manner, and who called Mr Paterson 'Sir,' and never addressed Herries without the prefix of 'Mr,' and seemed not at all at his ease in the presence of ladies. In fact he came up much more closely to what, in my ignorance of such matters, I supposed to be the conventional standard of attorneys, but then my acquaintance with the legal profession had been so far very limited. In India, happily, we had not much need for lawyers, and the only ones I knew anything of personally were a benevolent Chief-Justice of the Supreme Court at Calcutta, whose unbounded hospitality included all the young and friendless, as I had often experienced when a youngster doing duty at Dumdum; the other was a half-caste fellow said to be a barrister, but who never appeared in the presidency courts, and who picked up a precarious livelihood as a pleader in the up-country courts in any disreputable cases where Europeans were concerned, and the agency of such a creature, who spoke Hindustani better than English, was useful. It had been my ill fortune to meet this worthy every evening for about a month at the hotel *table d'hôte* of a station whither I had been detached on court-martial duty, and where he was pleading in some case in the local

court; and as we sometimes had the table to ourselves, we had thus got to be on speaking terms. But it was rash to generalise from specimens taken at the zenith and nadir of the profession. Certainly I never quite understood how Messrs Paterson and Herries came to associate with them in their firm a man so different to themselves as this young Crouch; perhaps it was to do the dirty work of the firm, if there was any to be done; at any rate he seemed of much less account in it than old Mr Roberts the head clerk, and his partners kept him at a great distance, addressing him familiarly by his surname, while he never spoke to them without the prefix of respect.

However, on the present eventful occasion Mr Crouch knew his place, was not only respectful to his partner, but appeared fascinated by the society of the young lady from the Royal Academy, and on the ladies leaving the dining-room through the open window into the lawn, that gentleman accompanied them; and as soon as Herries and I had resumed our seats, I at once fell to work.

"Mr Herries, can you put me in the way of setting about getting into Parliament?"

"Getting into Parliament? Are you thinking of taking up that line?"

"That's what I came home for. Of course there was the primary object of this affair of the property, but that was what made me in such a hurry about it."

"Well, I should say you couldn't do better. There's plenty of room for military men in Parliament. It will give you an occupation too, for I suppose you have had enough of soldiering by this time, and now that you are married you would like to be settled."

"No, I can't say that I am tired of the army, and my wife likes the notion of military life; but you know there is no need to leave it because one goes into Parliament."

"True, I had forgotten that. Oh no; your position would be the better both ways. A plain captain, saving your presence, may be a nobody, but a captain and M.P. is a very different sort of person. Well, I have no doubt it can be managed. You must be prepared to spend something of course."

"Anything in reason, or out of reason either, if that is the only difficulty. But now, can you advise me how to set to work?"

"Well, I should say the best plan would be to fix on some place, a small borough would be best; large places are apt to be dreadfully expensive unless you go in upon some extreme platform, and you ought to be at least a duke or an earl's son to carry off ultra-Radical principles properly. I know one or two snug little towns where there are no strong existing interests. You should fix on one of these, go down there, buy or rent a place in the neighbourhood, subscribe to all the local charities, give good dinners and make yourself popular—you may leave the pop-

ularity part to Mrs West—and then when the next general election——"

"Next general election? why, that is ever so far off! I want to get in at once."

"Ah! that's quite another matter. That's just what everybody wants to do who failed last time. It's a very difficult matter to get a seat nowadays. Why, I suppose there are a couple of hundred men at least looking out for seats at the present moment."

"Is that really so? Certainly I have heard the same thing said before. Everybody talks about there being these two hundred expectants, but there are no manifest signs of their existence. I daresay there may be a couple of hundred men who would like to drop into seats if they came in their way without any trouble, but if there are this number of eager applicants, why don't they appear? There was that election for the Cockaleekie Burghs only the other day, since I came home, but two hundred candidates did not come forward; there were only two."

"Ah! that was a Scotch seat, which choked off a lot of men to begin with. But of course I don't mean to say that everybody has an equal chance for every place. Want of local interest eliminates a lot of men. Then, again, a great many places are closed to those who are not on a particular side in politics. But local interest is the thing. It's a curious state of things altogether is this matter of getting into Parliament. You see men who would give their

heads and ten thousand pounds into the bargain for a seat and can't get one, and on the other hand you may see boroughs literally going a-begging."

"That is just the impression I had obtained merely from watching the course of elections in the papers. And one of these begging boroughs is just what I should like to find. But in most cases the chance of success, as far as I can make out, appears to depend on standing for a place where there are not stronger local interests already established—in fact, where the field is clear."

"You are quite right, I believe. Maryborough now is a case in point. That is the little place down in Northwestershire which I hail from,—at least I was brought up there as a boy, and my friends are living there still. Well, we could have brought you in or anybody else that we wanted at the last election. The big man of the place, Lord Awbury, who used to have the seat in his gift practically, has fallen out with the townspeople and lost all his influence, and the seat was literally going a-begging."

"Well, but why did not one of the two hundred expectants go down to such a land of Canaan as this with the ten thousand pounds in his pocket? This is just one of those chances which one would have thought everybody would have been on the watch to snap up."

"No, I believe a stranger would not have had a chance. If one had come down on our side, Lord

Awbury would have started a candidate on the other, and people would have been divided, for a local bigwig, quarrelsome or not, always has a certain amount of interest, and very possibly we should have lost the election. No, we needed some one sufficiently well known or well recommended to prevent a split. They wanted my brother, who is the leading solicitor in the place, to stand, but he declined to become an M.P. on any terms, and so at last they hit upon the local banker; he made a great fuss about it, but they insisted on his coming forward, and brought him in after a merely nominal contest. But he was not at all ambitious of the honour, and if you had been on the spot then, I daresay we could have managed the thing for you, and for a mere trifle."

"Excuse my asking the question, but with all this interest at your command, why did you not stand for the borough yourself?"

"Who? me? Oh no, that would not have suited me at all. I am much too busy for that sort of work: besides, it would not be in my line at all. I don't think you will find many of my fraternity in Parliament; we leave the talking work to be done by the talking branch of the profession, the barristers. But I daresay there will be a capital opening for you there next time, for our banker will hardly care to stand again; he is quite an elderly man."

"Well, but now, is there not such a thing as mak-

ing vacancies? Cannot men be got to retire sometimes in favour of others by a sort of private arrangement? Your friend the banker, for instance; if his membership involves such a sacrifice on his part, might he not be persuaded?"

"Well, as to that, people are apt to say a good deal more than they mean about such matters; and now that he is there, I am not at all sure that he does not enjoy the dignity of the thing as much as other people. No, I doubt if old Butler would care to retire, at any rate till the next general election, and of course anything in the shape of consideration would be quite out of the question in that quarter."

"Well, but setting aside Mr Butler and Maryborough, still I suppose there *are* men and places where considerations, as you call them, might not be without force?"

"I daresay there may be. I am not a parliamentary agent, you understand, and don't know much about these things; but I can soon make inquiries for you if you wish, and find out. But in such a case your chance of success, I suspect, would be a very risky one. All that a man can do for you by retiring is to secure a vacancy and an open field, and perhaps to give you the first start. You may find all your trouble and expense in that line come to nothing after all."

I remained silent. There could be no doubt of the soundness of his views; and, brought into con-

tact with common-sense, my schemes for immediate action seemed to melt away at once into a more visionary form than ever.

"But I take it, Captain West," continued Herries, after a pause, "that a year or two would not make any serious difference in your case? If you want to go into Parliament merely for the name of the thing, there would surely be no great harm in waiting a bit? But if you mean to lay yourself out for being a working member, why, you could not do better than begin by taking up some business in the city; go on to one or two directions, and so forth. This will stand you in capital stead when you go down to canvass any place. With your command of capital we could arrange this for you off the reel. Solid concerns I mean, of course—a first-class assurance company or joint-stock bank—not those shady things a man loses caste in the city by having anything to do with."

"Thank you very much; but waiting in this way is just what I am so anxious to avoid. The fact is, Mr Herries," I added, after some hesitation, "I have set my heart upon accomplishing this matter before this army reform game is played out. I can't at all express to you how anxious I feel about it, absurd as you may think it; but I assure you the calmness of my outward appearance is no index of the anxiety I feel at having lost even these few weeks in setting about this job. Is there really no way of carrying out my idea at once?"

Mr Herries got up thoughtfully, and stood with his back to the fireplace, giving his spectacles a little push further on to his nose before replying.

"Well," said he at last, "but after all—of course I don't pretend to know much about army matters, they are not in my line—but, from all I can hear, if you got into Parliament four or five years hence you would be in capital time for anything that is likely to be done beforehand, beyond what has been done already, and that, some of the papers seem to say, is all that is needed to be done. I should think that if this is your object there is no need for particular hurry."

"That may be very true, but it would be a very poor consolation to me all the while if my hopes had to be deferred so long. The fact is,—I daresay you will be amused at my confession, but I may as well make a clean breast of it at once, and then perhaps you will understand my eagerness in the matter. The truth is, I believe that what has been done, although well enough so far as it goes, nevertheless leaves a very great deal more still to be done; and I have a sort of idea, foolish perhaps, but not the less a strongly felt one, that I could bring some useful contributions to the discussion. You see, it seems to me that the people who are most eager about army reform are just those who don't know anything about it; and those who have the knowledge can't or won't make use of it. Now I think I may venture to say

that I have got to the bottom of the military mystery, so far as there really is anything mysterious about the thing, while I am certainly one of those who believe that there is room for further improvement. And what I am so anxious for is to get an opportunity——"

My little oration was here interrupted by the arrival of the coffee, and Mr Herries sat down and thoughtfully stirred his cup. At last he said—

"But it is not necessary for a man to get into Parliament in order to have his say about the army, or anything else. Why not ventilate your ideas in print?"

"Nobody seems to read books nowadays; at least nobody does who is living about town, and one doesn't want to convert the people who live down in the country."

"Well, if they don't read books they certainly don't read speeches. But it is not necessary to bring out a big book in order to have your say. There are plenty of editors ready to get hold of ideas and put them into shape for you. In that way you may get as much publicity as you like."

"But do you think that is really a good way of attracting attention? It seems to me that things said in a newspaper are practically lost, buried in the mass of matter poured forth."

"People certainly read the papers if they read nothing else."

"Yes, but it goes out of their heads as fast as it goes in. People seem to me to read for the news, or to kill time, or from habit, not to learn. Besides, the papers are so one-sided, most of them, that people don't believe in them. Either the Government are a set of hopelessly incompetent blunderers, or they represent all the honesty and ability of the country as collected on that side. Any proposals coming forward with a trade-mark of that sort stamped on them are sure to be received with more or less suspicion; besides, everybody does not read the same paper."

"Oh! if you want to be sure of having the whole country for audience, then I admit even a daily paper might fail you. But I suggested writing instead of speaking because you seemed to be in such a hurry. Even when you get into Parliament that is merely one step. It takes a man perhaps a dozen years to get what they call the ear of the House."

"Is that necessarily so? Look at Rigby Sebright and Summer-toppe; they appear to have gone off at score almost from the first day they entered it."

"As for that, Rigby Sebright is literally made of brass. He is a man who would always make himself heard wherever he was. It would take a good deal to put *him* down. And he is an uncommonly long-headed fellow to boot. Then you must remember that both of these men are barristers, men who have been accustomed to talk on their legs for years."

"Well, then, take Pendragon; he went into Parliament almost straight from college, yet he seems to talk pretty freely."

"Yes, very true, but then very possibly he may have practised beforehand at debating clubs; besides, he went in with a university reputation. Of course I don't deny that there are such cases, but then there must be natural gifts for the thing. And very possibly you may yourself have had the needful practice beforehand to make you feel sure of your powers. You will excuse my plain speaking, I am sure, but you want my advice, and so I feel bound to say what I think."

"That is precisely what I desire, and I daresay you will think me still more presumptuous when I tell you that I have never addressed half-a-dozen people together in my life. Nevertheless, absurd as it may sound to say it, I feel certain that I could do so without any difficulty if I had anything to say, and the opportunity for saying it. Besides, though here again it may appear very absurd to offer an opinion when my sole experience is derived from three or four visits to the gallery of the House, if one thing impressed me more than another about the place, it is the patience with which men are listened to who have got anything to say, without any reference to their manner of saying it. It is, for the matter of that, almost the same with men who have nothing to say. The tolerance of bores there is surprising."

"To tell you the truth, I have not been present at a debate for years. I could not manage the time even if I wanted to, but judging from what I see of members out of the House—and I have had to do with a good many one way and another—I can quite understand that they may be dreadfully stupid there as elsewhere. But, after all, speaking in Parliament won't do what you want any more than writing. Independent members are perfectly powerless to introduce changes in such a matter as you speak of. If you want to be reforming the army, you must get a place in the Government. And that is not an easy matter, whatever public speaking may be."

"I see you are laughing at me, and you will laugh still more when I tell you that this is part of my scheme too. A very humble place will do; I ought to mention that although a simple regimental officer now, I have had some experience of public business, although in what you would perhaps consider a small way, still sufficient for giving an insight into the ways of Government; and my belief is that all you want is the power of initiation. Provided you have that, and get other people to take up your ideas, and are behind the scenes to help to pull the administrative wires, it does not matter much, I suspect, who is nominally the leader. Of course you must have the opportunity of expounding your ideas, and that a seat in the House would give. And please don't run away with the notion that I believe myself en-

dowed with any special gifts or special knowledge. There are dozens of men in the army, I daresay, who would do the thing just as well, probably very much better, only they haven't the chance. I should never have done more than think about the thing in more or less dreamy fashion—for men don't trouble themselves about the impossible—but for the stroke of fortune which has befallen me. As things have turned out, however, I feel the impulse very strong upon me, and anyhow I must make the attempt."

"Well," said Herries, after a pause, "my devil's advocacy of the difficulties before you has at least made it plain that you are very anxious to get into Parliament, and the point is now, how to forward your wishes. There are men who make it their business to manage this sort of thing, and it can be easily arranged to put you in communication with them. At the same time, I am rather afraid you will find their hands full already—that is, that they have already pledged themselves to other applicants to help to any seats likely to fall in. The competition for these things is tremendous, I have always understood. And after all I have no great belief in these gentry. I see that Government officials often cannot find a seat when they want one, which looks as if there were a good deal of humbug about this special agency business. Still we must see what can be done. But, mean time, you ought certainly to have a second string to your bow; you ought to

establish a local interest of the kind I mentioned just now, in view to the next general election. I should say it would not be at all a bad plan to try Maryborough. It's a nice country enough, and the hunting is pretty fair, I believe, which I suppose would be an attraction. I daresay you would have no difficulty in finding a suitable place for rent in the neighbourhood. If you don't fancy Maryborough, some other little borough might be tried. There is Leatherby, for instance; why, bless my soul!" said Herries, jumping up, and taking his old position before the fireplace, "how is it I never thought of this before? Why, Leatherby would be the very place of all others. Sheepshanks has the borough in his pocket, and he and Paterson are on most intimate terms, and there must be a vacancy there before long. Yes, it was odd I never thought of this sooner; Leatherby is the very place of all others to go in for. Besides, you are known there already, or at any rate Mrs West is. Her relations live there, don't they? So you will have some local interest to start with."

I thought of Miss Barton's circle of friends, old Miss Barbour, Mrs Crane, and the Misses Provest, and observed that I feared in an electioneering point of view my wife's acquaintance would hardly be able to help much.

"Never mind," replied Herries, "you won't need any other help if Sheepshanks will support you. He

returns the second member just as easily as he does himself. The great point is, that very likely you may not have to wait for a general election. Lord Stowe may go off any day; he is a very old man, and very shaky, as I happen to know; and then Lord Wraymouth's seat becomes vacant."

"But is it not likely Mr Sheepshanks may be already committed to local interests of some sort? The contingency of this seat becoming available must be foreseen by others as well as by us. I should be afraid we shall find ourselves forestalled here. There are almost sure to be men on the spot who want to get in."

"I don't know about that. Lord Wraymouth has had the seat almost unopposed there for five-and-twenty years, till people must have almost forgotten to think about the possibility of a change of members. Besides, Sheepshanks is an eccentric man in some ways, and I am told keeps very much aloof from the people about him, and certainly he would not encourage any negotiations about the matter while Lord Wraymouth is there. Nor can you yourself do anything for the present; but depend upon it Leatherby is just the place to look out for. Paterson knows all about it much better than I do. I am not well acquainted with Sheepshanks myself, but Paterson and he are very old friends. I'll speak to Paterson about it to-morrow."

At this juncture Mrs Herries looked in to say that

there were lights in the drawing-room, and that the young lady from the Royal Academy was going to sing. To the drawing-room accordingly we repaired.

"I'll talk over the matter with Paterson to-morrow," said Herries, as we left the room. "I did mean to go down to Manchester by the twelve o'clock train, but it will do just as well to start in the evening, and I will see Paterson first."

I expressed my thanks hurriedly as we passed into the drawing-room for the hearty interest he took in the matter, but begged him not to let Paterson know why I was in such a hurry about it. "For goodness' sake don't tell him all I have told you. One confession is enough. I don't want both my friends to think me a donkey."

We found Mr Crouch standing by the piano, with a pleased simper on his face, turning over the music-leaves for the young lady from the Royal Academy. It was in keeping with my little wife's unaffected simplicity of character, and her sister's, that after the first-named accomplished vocalist had sung three or four songs, sending her powerful voice well out of the room through the open windows into the garden, and so round to the shrubbery in the front, till even the cabman who was waiting to convey Mr Crouch to the train might share in the general entertainment —that after this quite thrilling exhibition Eva and Sybil should not refuse to take her place at the instrument, and to sing one of their simple duets; for

I have observed that many young ladies who sing reserve themselves for occasions when invidious comparisons are not likely to be made. Even more pleasing was the perfect good taste with which they received the young lady's somewhat overdone expressions of delight at the treat they had afforded her.

CHAPTER XV.

REPORTS PROGRESS.

"So," said Mr Paterson, when, the second day after that described in the foregoing chapter, I went down to the office in Gracechurch Street to discuss the interminable schedule—"so you want to go into Parliament. I wish I had known this before you went down to Leatherby. I would have made a point of introducing you to my friend Sheepshanks, for Herries's idea of trying to get you in there seems a very good one. I am afraid there is no chance of his coming to town again this session, and I can't very well go down there without some business to take me, for this is a sort of thing that must be managed carefully. Anyhow, there is no hurry in the matter; very possibly it may not come to anything for some years. The great thing is to be on the look-out, and we are in a position to have the first information if the seat is likely to be vacant. Meanwhile, what Herries suggests about your establishing yourself down there seems a very good one, supposing you fancy the neighbourhood."

The idea certainly did seem a very good one, especially as it would keep the sisters together, for Sybil's visit to us could not be indefinitely prolonged. But in my restless state of mind I felt quite unable to face the prospect of settling down to that sort of country life. Something more than partridge-shooting was needed for inducing a habit of patience. There was a still stronger reason against the plan. The physician whom by Mr Fergusson's advice I had called in to see Eva pronounced that her system wanted tone, and recommended change of air and a course of Kissingen waters, so we determined to pay that place a visit. Parliament was up, and Mr Paterson wanted to be off on his annual visit to his sister in Scotland; Herries was about to start for America on business; and the progress of scheduling the estate was practically suspended. Not that there really appeared to be anything remaining to be done. All the more risky investments had been withdrawn, and the bulk of the property was now concentrated in a few good securities—in fact there was nothing remaining towards the completion of the executor's business that might not, so far as I could see, be despatched in a few hours. But Mr Paterson was not a man to be hurried. Happily we are not responsible for our thoughts, but it makes me blush even now when I call to mind how it struck me at the time that the estate was now in a handy form for a man who wanted to realise it, and that it would be a very

convenient opportunity for doing so when both Herries and myself were away, and Mr Roberts the managing clerk also bound on a fortnight's holiday. Happily, too, my worthy friend did not know the base suspicions with which I involuntarily repaid his disinterested kindness.

However, there being no longer a reason for staying in town, which was already empty and very hot and stuffy, we started off with a due supply of circular notes and an undue supply of luggage, Sybil, Eva, Annette, the little maid whom we had brought away from Leatherby, and myself, all full of pleased expectancy, and Annette trembling with wonder and anxiety at this her second great move in life. We took the Rhine route, which I believe we enjoyed quite as much as the ordinary run of travellers; but inasmuch as the girls knew no German, and almost less French, and my acquaintance with those languages was merely a book one, we did not add much to the general stock of observation which our countrymen have already brought to bear on those regions.

At Kissingen we led the usual pottering, purposeless life affected by idle people at the smaller German baths, and as Eva had to get up early to drink the water, the days were not too short. A more uninteresting life so far as incidents go it would be difficult to conceïve, yet I look back on that time of peace as one of the happiest in my life. The day began with a very early saunter in *deshabille* on the promenade,

while Eva consumed about forty tumblers of water to the strains of the band. Then back to the hotel to make a more complete toilette and breakfast. Then a morning passed in quiet idling on the part of the girls, and German lessons on mine. They joined in these at first, and we took in a German newspaper and used to spell through the advertisements in turn, but the business was voted stupid at length, and I was left to take my lessons alone. The music was more successful. They had lessons both in the piano and singing, and it was hard to say which of the two improved fastest, while for people who had never been accustomed to settle down to anything, it was surprising how much they practised. In the afternoon we sallied forth again to the promenade, where every one, as before, spent the time in fatiguing himself by slow pacing up and down to the music of the band. Then there was dinner, and then another stroll.

New acquaintances of course were made during our sojourn, nor were old acquaintances wanting. Young Brodie of the Indian Public Works to wit, who lived out on the canals near Sirdhanna, and used to drive in occasionally to partake of station hospitality, attired in a blanket jumper by way of coat, a mushroom pith hat about three feet in diameter, and white trousers which might have been made for a much smaller brother. I confess I did not recognise Brodie at first when he accosted me, attired

in one of Hoole's frock-coats of faultless make, a geranium in his button-hole, and altogether from his glossy black hat down to his natty boots looking more adapted to the meridian of Bond Street than the free-and-easy appearance affected at a German bath; while his whilom shaggy beard was trimmed to a Vandyke point, and nothing remained of his former jungly aspect but the incipient baldness due to exposure under an Indian sun. "Jamie looks a respectable being now," said Miss Brodie, who with her mother was being escorted by the newly-returned brother through a German tour, "but you never saw such a figure as he was when he first came home. I hope all the gentlemen in India don't dress like that, for he wants me to go back with him when his furlough is over, and I am sure I couldn't stay there if people are such frights." I assured her that although last week's fashions were not strictly followed there, still that the men on the canals must not be taken as samples, for that they were looked on as an exceptional race of wild beings. But the great advantage of India, I observed, was that in that climate people never grew old, a view of things which, still more than my assurances about the civilisation of the country, appeared to reconcile that young lady to the prospect of exile. Her brother was a young fellow of a little over thirty, and Mrs Brodie had informed me incidentally that he was her youngest child.

Then there was Featherstone of the Civil Service, like Mr Barton a Commissioner, generally regarded by the fellow-residents of his station as the cheeriest of old bachelors, and famous for his ladies' dinner-parties, but who now turned up with a fashionable wife and two showy daughters. "It was so hard to leave the children," Mrs Featherstone explained, as we lounged up and down the promenade, "when their education had to be looked after; and really my health used to be so delicate in India; and then my husband had bought our house at Brighton, and there was a difficulty about finding a tenant; and we wanted a home for the boys in the holidays; and so it seemed better in every way that he should leave me at home. But these new furlough regulations are a great blessing; it is such a comfort to have Mr Featherstone home again after being out only three years; indeed I don't think I could have made this journey alone with the girls." But there is no lot in life without its trials, and Mrs Featherstone appeared to be already somewhat depressed by the fact that in two years her husband would complete his full term of service and be obliged to retire, "and how we are to manage then I am sure I don't know, with three boys at school to provide for. Mr Featherstone's own expenditure has always been very heavy, quite equal indeed to what his pension will be, and with our double establishment we have never been able to save anything." Meantime, until this stroke of ill-

fortune should descend they were making the best of their time; and for people who saw each other only about every five or six years they seemed a truly attached couple.

But our principal friends at Kissingen were the Lowders. Mrs Lowder was an invalid, on whose account the visit had been made; the two girls were nice-looking, clever, and a little blue, although on our becoming acquainted they straightway fell down and worshipped my two companions; but to me secretly the great attraction was the father, for Sergeant Lowder was member for Drymouth, a cheery pleasant fellow, full of conversation, and never tired of talking Parliamentary shop, as I was certainly never tired of listening. And when I observed the impression which the House had evidently made upon him; how this prosperous, well-known advocate appeared to be scarcely on speaking terms with the chiefs of his own party, and admitted to me in confidence as we sat smoking under a lime-tree in the gardens, that he never rose to speak without trepidation, and how, after being five years in the House, he still felt himself, to use his own expression, "a mere junior;"—when such was the experience of this light of the criminal bar, who had spent his life on his legs, and was reputed to be able to turn any witness inside out; with such a precedent before me, my heart sank within me as I thought of the absurdity of the hopes I had allowed myself to nourish, that I,

an untried stranger, should succeed in soaring to higher flights where such a man had failed.

Such reflections were wholesome, no doubt; but at this distance from England, and when the noise of Parliamentary business had died away in the recess, the foolish restlessness which possessed me there had to a great extent passed away. Nor had I heard anything from the firm to keep up any excitement of feeling. Mr Paterson was still, I supposed, in Scotland; Mr Herries had gone to New York; my last letter was one from Mr Roberts the manager, sending a further supply of circular notes; and I was becoming quite settled down to the quiet monotonous life we were leading, which brought my wife improved health daily—the mornings with a German master, the afternoons in reading some book aloud, when the girls did fancy-work and professed to listen, the evenings given to music in the Lowders' or our apartments. Six weeks had passed away in this fashion, and four tumblers of the cold water were becoming almost too cold in the fresh morning air, when the course of our quiet life was interrupted by the arrival of a telegram, which we found awaiting us on our return one evening from a picnic with the Lowders and Featherstones in the neighbouring mountain woods.

It ran as follows:—

"From R. Roberts, Gracechurch Street, London, to Captain West, Hotel de Russie, Kissingen. Mr

Paterson thinks a favourable opportunity may soon occur for carrying out your wish. He recommends your speedy return."

It was quite needless to enjoin speed. Annette and Sybil sat up half the night packing, for the latter would not allow Eva to exert herself, and we started from Kissingen the next morning, travelling homewards as fast as we could without undue fatigue to the latter. Eva was delighted with the news when I explained its purport, knowing my anxiety on the subject, but happily did not ask for particulars as to how I expected to carry out my plan, so I was not obliged to confess my ignorance, and my utter dependence in the matter on the friendly firm. For Sybil it was sufficient to know that we were recalled by business.

CHAPTER XVI.

THREE CONSPIRATORS VISIT LEATHERBY.

I TELEGRAPHED from Brussels that we should arrive in town the same evening, and Dobbins the office messenger was waiting to meet us at the Charing Cross station. Mr Paterson, he reported, was down in Lincolnshire, but would be back the next day, and begged that we would go to Sackville Street as before, where everything was ready for us. Mr Herries had returned from America the day before, but had gone down again to Liverpool that morning.

To Sackville Street accordingly we went, and found that Mrs Benton, the good lady who combined the functions of cook and housekeeper, had prepared dinner for us; Frederick, Mr Paterson's man, was waiting to receive us, and we were soon settled down as comfortably as if we had never been absent. But the air of Sackville Street seemed dirty and thick after Kissingen, and a sort of reaction followed the excitement of the journey. Nor had Mr Paterson left a single line in elucidation of his first message;

and as the ladies retired almost immediately after dinner, I wandered out to walk down my restlessness, taking, as was natural, the route of the great building at Westminster, now dark and silent.

Next day, about noon, came a telegram from Mr Paterson from the city. He had gone there straight on his return, would I go down to meet him? Of course I drove down to Gracechurch Street at once, whither he had arrived by a morning train, and in a few minutes the reason for our sudden recall was explained. The opportunity we had talked about, it seemed, was likely to occur at once. Lord Stowe was very ill, and gradually sinking, and would not outlive the week. "I have just come from his lordship's place," Mr Paterson went on to say. "We are not his lawyers, although we have been employed by him and Lord Wraymouth at different times. His regular lawyer is a solicitor at Lincoln; but the latter asked my advice about certain testamentary arrangements his lordship desired to make, and so I went down. And this, you see, is how I have become acquainted with the facts. If we had been the family lawyers, I should have considered myself bound in confidence to say nothing about the matter, indeed not to act without first taking note of Lord Wraymouth's wishes. And of course all I am saying now is in confidence. But the fact is, the seat at Leatherby will be vacant before the end of the week, and Lord Wraymouth is away yachting in Greece with his daughters, so

that there is really no opportunity of acting with him, or consulting him in the matter. The succession to his seat will be settled before he can get home. If you are to take advantage of this opportunity, it will be necessary to act at once. Now the question is, what is the best thing to be done?"

Thereon we fell to discussing the matter. Mr Paterson's idea of the proper line of action was, that he should write to Mr Sheepshanks, informing him of the probable vacancy in the representation of the borough, and asking for his support on my behalf; and although this seemed hardly a vigorous way of setting to work, or a fitting sequence to our rapid flight from Kissingen, still I did not like to press my kind friend to do more than he felt inclined to undertake himself, more especially in a matter turning on the death of a man who was still alive; and accordingly I was writing a letter to Mr Sheepshanks at Mr Paterson's dictation, and in his name—he never wrote a letter with his own hand if he could help it, but generally called in a clerk to act as amanuensis—when Mr Herries and his travelling bags arrived from Liverpool, and he came straightway into Mr Paterson's room, and after greetings the nature of our occupation was explained to him.

Herries was for more vigorous action at once. Everything depended on taking steps quickly. There would be a dozen men after the seat as soon as the news got abroad, as it would have done already if

Lord Wraymouth had been at home; the Treasury whip would be writing to Mr Sheepshanks to ask his support for some candidate, and a promise would be given, and we should be too late.

"I don't see myself," said Herries, "any difference between acting before a man's actually dead, and acting before he is buried, and that you will have to do in any case if you really mean business. Writing will never do here. Suppose Mr Sheepshanks were to ask for further information, or to propose conditions; then there will be a reply, and further writing and delay, and so the chance will be lost. Besides, the matter of this vacancy may have got wind already; who knows but what a letter may go down from the Treasury whip by the same post? He may have telegraphed already, very likely, and Mr Sheepshanks is a stanch man by the Government. No, no; everything will turn on an hour or two, depend on it. The best plan is to go down at once and see him yourself. I think Captain West should go too, and be ready to give any explanations needed, or guarantees for the genuine liberalness of his principles."

Mr Herries was so strong on this point that his partner soon agreed to the plan, and proposed starting the following morning, as it was now two o'clock, and there was no reasonable train available; but the former insisted on the value of time, and urged that we should go down by the night mail. I felt that

this was the right thing to do, if we went at all, but did not like to say anything, for my elderly friend was evidently tired from his morning's journey; but his younger partner, whose normal state it was to spend the night in a railway carriage, thereby, as he said, saving the day for business, made light of the half-expressed objections, and so it was arranged accordingly; and Herries, after leaving the room, put in his head again to say that he would go too, and was out of the house before Mr Paterson could stop him.

I returned to Sackville Street to order, on Mr Paterson's behalf, an early dinner, leaving him to follow after he had transacted some business. Eva was delighted when I told her that there was a possibility of my becoming member for Leatherby in place of Lord Wraymouth, although she could not understand why that nobleman should be obliged to retire from the representation; but still more at the prospect opened of going down shortly to see her aunt. It was agreed, however, that Sybil should be told for the present only that I was called down to Leatherby on business, but business quite unconnected with the little house in Church Street.

After dinner, Mr Paterson and I set off to catch the night mail. This was the first time Eva and I had been separated, and the back drawing-room was witness to a tender parting while Mr Paterson followed Frederic and the luggage down to the hall;

nor could my gentle wife restrain a tear or two, although I should not be absent for more than a couple of days at most, while receiving the ten-pound note which I made over to her in case money should be needed, the first she ever had possession of, I think, for hitherto I had been paymaster on all occasions.

It appeared at first that Herries would not be of the party, but he came rushing out of the ticket-room on to the platform at the last moment, followed by Dobbins the messenger carrying his travelling-bags and rug (that useful creature, by the way, seemed to spend a considerable part of his life on railway platforms), to whom, standing at the carriage-door, he conveyed a string of messages and instructions up to the last instant.

Knowing how emphatically his time was money, and what a quantity of travelling he had on his own account, I felt quite uneasy that Herries should be coming down too, and I took the opportunity of his partner having settled down to a nap to apologise for giving him so much trouble.

"Don't mention it," said Herries. "When I take up a thing, I like to go through with it. Besides, if we manage this job well, it will save a lot of trouble by-and-by, for of course you won't be satisfied till you get what you want; and between ourselves," he added, dropping his voice, "although I don't know a man in London with a sounder judgment than Paterson, still, you see, he is not so young as he was, and

he may not be quite so alive as I am to the value of time in affairs of this kind, where a few hours or minutes may be decisive one way or the other. So altogether my coming may be of use."

With this Mr Herries tucked his railway rug round him, and adjusting his spectacles firmly on his nose, prepared for sleep. I tried to follow his example, but in vain; the excitement of the prospect before us was too great. There is no time when the brain conjures up images of the past and visions of the future more busily than during a sleepless railway journey. The motion of the train imparts a sort of exaltation to the brain, though its activity may be exerted in a purposeless inconsecutive fashion. Thus as we rattled along, scene after scene of my life came up; my landing in India and the enjoyment of all the novelty that awaits first-comers there; my first campaign; my appointment to the horse artillery; my service in the secretariat; return to military duty; the season at Sirmoori ending in my captivity; the pig-sticking party on the banks of the Ganges; the news of accession to fortune; love-making; the Barton family; marriage; the journey home, and horrible anxiety it occasioned, now passed away like a bad dream; my first acquaintance with Mr Paterson, and the ridiculous suspicions that would force themselves on my mind, do what I might to keep them down; our visit to Leatherby and Eva's gentle aunt, and Harry Perkins and all the people there;

our picnic in Thorpe woods; and then, for the first time, there flashed upon me the recollection of my conversation with Mr Fergusson, and the hopes he confided to me about bringing in Squire Drew as member for the borough whenever a vacancy should occur. As all that had passed on that occasion was recalled to mind, a feeling quite of horror came over me at the possible misconstruction that might be put on my conduct in thus stealing a march on the other side, and after a bad quarter of an hour, I took the opportunity of a general waking up at Stalebun Junction to explain my dilemma to Herries. How it had suddenly occurred to me that my going down in this way to Leatherby, where I was already known, would certainly be observed; the difficulty of accounting for my visit to friends, while to conceal its object would seem unfair to the Conservatives, whose intentions I had become acquainted with unintentionally, yet so to speak in confidence.

My companion, however, made light of these difficulties. "As for being seen," he said, "we shall get there before it is light, and as Sheepshanks lives out of the town, and never has any company, you may come and go without anybody being a bit the wiser."

"But then it seems so like stealing a march on the other side."

"That is just what we want to do. It is everything in such matters to be first in the field."

"Of course, and if I were a perfect stranger to the

place, it would be all well enough. But then having been taken into the confidence of the other party, as it were, I confess I feel as if almost treacherous to be acting behind their backs."

"Well, but then this other party, as you call it, what does it really consist of? I have always understood that it did not exist. Did Drew himself tell you that he meant to come forward and fight whenever this vacancy happened?"

"I can't say that he did. It was my friend the doctor who confided to me the hopes of their party to secure one of the two seats in the borough by-and-by."

"Well, but, now really all this seems to me very shadowy and vague. If it had been a gentleman of my profession who worked the party, there might have been something in it; but the idea of being hindered by—I don't want to say anything against your friend, but you may be pretty sure that a country doctor will be much too anxious to keep his practice together, and too busy into the bargain, to meddle much with politics. And merely because this gentleman told you he should like to see a member returned of his way of thinking? Really, Captain West, you must excuse my saying that I cannot see the force of your scruples."

"I am very conscious that I must seem unreasonable; and, as you put the case, it looks absurd enough; but I cannot well make you understand how the thing came about, or the sort of relation I stand

on with the other people in this matter. Here is Drew's daughter, a most intimate friend of Mrs West, brought up together, and living in the same house for years; and now to go down secretly and make arrangements for cutting out her father! Upon my word, I don't see how I am to do it."

"Well, I must say, Captain West," replied Herries, settling himself back in his corner of the carriage with an air of vexation, "it is a pity you did not think of these things before we started. If a man is to be thrown off an election by every fanciful notion that comes uppermost, or because somebody else wants the seat, he had better give up the idea of Parliament altogether."

As I looked at Mr Paterson taking his uneasy night's rest opposite, his face having slipped down into his comforter, till merely the top of his nose appeared, one eye covered with his wig now all awry under the jolting, and thought how the good-natured old gentleman had given up his proper night's rest through disinterested kindness on my behalf, and how my other companion had scarcely passed an hour out of a railway carriage since his return from America, and that he too had taken the matter up apparently through sheer friendliness, I felt very keenly the ungracious aspect my conduct would present to both of them, and perhaps still more so the ludicrousness of the situation, embarrassing as it seemed.

"You are quite justified in feeling annoyed," I answered after a pause; "and, of course, I ought to have foreseen these complications sooner. But please do not misunderstand me. I am quite prepared to contest the election against any man. My difficulty does not lie there. What I am doubtful about is the propriety of doing so without giving fair notice to the other side, especially as I had in confidence been made acquainted to a certain extent with their plans."

"But you are not going to contest an election. What you are going to do is to put certain questions to Mr Sheepshanks. Surely he is the proper person to speak to first? There can be no call either in honour or common-sense to go running about Leatherby telling everybody that you have come down to ask Mr Sheepshanks a favour?"

"That way of putting the thing no doubt makes me look absurd, but——"

"Besides," interrupted Herries, to whom this argument had come up quite suddenly, and who therefore spoke as if he had kept it in view all along, "supposing that Mr Sheepshanks is committed already to some other applicant, or that for any other reason he declines to support you, would you not look rather foolish if you had let it be known that you had asked?"

"Certainly that way of putting it has great force."

"I can't see how there can be any other way of

looking at it. Let us hear first what Sheepshanks says about the matter; and if he goes in to back you up, there will be time enough then to consider your line of action. If he doesn't, why the less said about our journey the better."

This reasoning appeared at the time unanswerable, and indeed it was an immense comfort to have my qualms of conscience thus laid to rest; but I objected that I could not hope to keep my visit a secret; the people at the station would be sure to recognise me.

"Well, for the matter of that, it will be quite dark when we arrive, but this train does not go on to Leatherby; we shall have to drive from the junction, and I told Dobbins to telegraph for a carriage to meet us there, so we shall drive through Leatherby without being seen."

To this there seemed to be nothing more to be replied, and I think we both fell asleep eventually to awake at the Leatherby junction. It was still quite dark, but I thought I could detect the Fergusson mare as one of the pair in the carriage awaiting us, and as I carried my bag across the platform and deposited it in the carriage, I turned my coat-collar well up to avoid detection.

While on the way to the house, which lay about two miles beyond the town, I referred to the discussion which had taken place coming down, and said to Mr Paterson that although Mr Herries had satis-

fied the scruples I felt about the expedition generally, I still felt uneasy about the possession of the secret regarding Lord Wraymouth and his father. But Mr Paterson observed that the information was not mine but his, and conveyed to me in confidence; and added that at any rate it would be sufficient to let this point stand over till Mr Sheepshanks had the news. He might be safely trusted to take whatever action was needed and proper in a matter which concerned his old friend and fellow-member. There was nothing to be objected to so sensible a view, and we drove on in silence till our journey came to an end. Indeed the old gentleman looked tired and crusty, and not disposed for conversation.

Mr Sheepshanks' house and grounds lay in the valley of the Yew leading to Thorpe, which here expanded to a width sufficient to contain, besides some fields, a good-sized lawn and gardens with an acre or two of wood, all on the bank of the river, and separated from the main road by a thick-set hedge. We were not expected, for at Mr Herries's suggestion no announcement had been sent of our coming, and the footman and a housemaid were in the act of shaking out the door-mats on the hall-steps, in a manner suggestive of a well-regulated flirtation between the two, notwithstanding the depressing influence of the chill morning fog which lay heavy on the lawn. Mr Paterson was at once recognised, and we were shown into the dining-room, which

looked cheerless and half-swept; and altogether our party seemed rather forlorn, the old gentleman especially, unshorn and unkempt, with his wig still awry, and I could not resist the feeling that we had come on a fool's errand. But the spirits of most of us are under the influence of external things; the coffee and tea brought in and the warm fire made while our rooms were being got ready soon revived the party; and as we went up to dress, the butler, who had just taken in the news of our arrival to his master's room, together with a jug of hot water of a size suggesting that the latter came to maturity before the days of tubbing, brought back word that Mr Sheepshanks would be glad to see Mr Paterson at eight o'clock in his study, and by that time my friend descended to the appointment looking quite a different man—shaven, his wig neatly brushed, brisk and cheery as ever. Herries meanwhile took a stroll in the garden, and I looked out of the breakfast-room window upon the river, the same stream that ran past Miss Barton's garden, feeling too excited for companionship; feeling also very much like a schoolboy whose papa has gone in to see the head-master and ask leave to take him out for the day; watching in a feeble way the ducks which had waddled up from the river and stood in a row on the lawn before the window. Their presence and expectation were presently explained by the entry of their mistress into the

room, a middle-aged, delicate-looking, and shy lady, Miss Sheepshanks, who was evidently puzzled to account for my visit, but quite incurious; it was explained sufficiently no doubt by my being in company with her old friend. Happily the ducks and the feeding of them did duty for conversation, and presently we were joined by Herries, and shortly afterwards by the other two gentlemen, when I could see from Mr Paterson's face that he was satisfied with what had passed, while Mr Sheepshanks' greeting was cordial and agreeable.

During breakfast the conversation was quite general. That over, Mr Paterson signified that Mr Sheepshanks wished to confer with us both, and we retired to his study. I looked to where Herries was standing, making a sort of mute inquiry whether he should not be invited to make one of the party, but neither Mr Paterson nor Mr Sheepshanks responded to the appeal, and as Herries did not seem to expect to be asked I passed in.

Mr Paterson then in his quiet way at once fell to business, sitting well back in an easy-chair, with his legs crossed, his elbows resting on the arms, and fingers pressed together. Mr Sheepshanks sat more upright, with his head a little on one side, and occasionally refreshing himself with a pinch of snuff. Mr Paterson's communication, for Mr Sheepshanks hardly spoke, was that the latter accepted his description of my soundness in political opinions and

general eligibility—he must, I presume, have spoken much more warmly behind my back than he did now, to have carried his friend so heartily into the matter—and was prepared to give me his full support in the event of the vacancy occurring, with the proviso, however, that the Government agent should be first consulted. It was only due to the Government, Mr Sheepshanks thought, especially as Lord Wraymouth was a member of it, that he should ascertain whether there was any one connected with it in particular need of a seat just now. If the Government had no special desire to be served at the present moment, then I could come forward with Mr Sheepshanks' full support.

I could not, under the circumstances, sympathise with his stanchness to his party so much as perhaps it deserved, but I could thoroughly appreciate his friendliness in thus taking up the cause of a perfect stranger so heartily, still more the great and disinterested kindness of our common friend who had brought about the arrangement.

Mr Paterson then mentioned what they thought should be done. First the Secretary to the Treasury must be referred to, but simultaneous preparations should be quietly made for organising a committee and inviting the support of the more influential residents of the place. At this point Mr Herries was summoned to join in the deliberation, and he at once proposed to return by the first train, and see the Secretary if possible before night. As regards local

action, it was explained that Mr Sheepshanks could not take any direct part in the affair; but his Leather-by agent and factory manager would both of them no doubt be ready to serve on the committee, which would be the same thing as if he did so himself. The great thing, however, would be to bespeak the aid of Mr Rupert Bowles, who was the most active politician in the place; and accordingly the three gentlemen set off in Mr Sheepshanks' carriage, which had been waiting some time at the door, to call together on that gentleman, after which Herries was to start for town, first telegraphing to the Treasury whip to secure an appointment if possible for that evening. I would fain have returned too, to get out of what appeared to be a false position, but could not well desert Mr Paterson, who needed a night in bed after his fatigues; so it was agreed that we two should remain till the following day.

The morning, I am bound to say, was a long one. Miss Sheepshanks was shy, and apparently unaccustomed to society of any kind, leading the life of a recluse. I learnt afterwards that, when first her father settled in the place and built his factory, a struggling man driven from the north by strikes, the county people had kept aloof from him; and afterwards when he became the richest man within twenty miles (even if the income rumour assigned to him were divided by four), he declined their advances, either by way of resenting their behaviour or because

he had become accustomed to his solitary position, and occupied himself solely in business and good works, never appearing in public except to take the chair at a public meeting, and never speaking even then a word more than could be helped. Family sorrows may have had their influence too over his way of life: he had lost an only son, and his married daughter and her husband; and there now only remained to him the grandson at Harrow, destined, if he survived the fatal dampness of these low-lying meadows, to succeed him in the mill and his seat, and the middle-aged spinster with whom I was now endeavouring to maintain a conversation that should have the semblance of interest on either side. In her way Miss Sheepshanks was as unsophisticated as aunt Emily; certainly her acquaintance with people was smaller, for she never accompanied her father in his visits to London; and I suspect this was the first occasion of her meeting with a military man, at any rate a captain of horse artillery. However, everybody is interested about something, if you can only find out what it is; and next after her nephew her poultry and garden and the village schools occupied Miss Sheepshanks' attention, and in going the round of these we became quite animated. Truly grateful, too, did I feel to a certain tame duck of special rarity and plumage, a dissertation on whose merits detained us for five minutes on the gravel path inside the highroad before emerging on the village green; for

while under the shelter of the hedge who should ride past but Drew himself, on his market-day visit to Leatherby, riding slowly along on the grassy side, close to the hedge, avoiding the hot September sun.

Our tour ended, I repaired to my room to write the draft of my address to the electors, but deferred this undertaking for a nap, from which I was awakened by the return of Mr Paterson. Mr Rupert Bowles had been visited and had entered heartily into the affair, and Mr Scrap, the leading attorney, had been summoned to the mill and was also secured. Both these gentlemen, as well as Mr Hunter, the mill-manager, were coming to dinner, an announcement which evidently caused Miss Sheepshanks some trepidation, and her disappearance to the offices for the rest of the afternoon.

Mr Paterson and I then set to work upon the address, which we got through just as Mr Sheepshanks returned from his counting-house, and while reading it over a telegram for the former was brought in from the Leatherby station. It was from the lawyer at Lincoln and as follows: "Lord Stowe expired at half-past seven o'clock this morning." It had been addressed to the office in Gracechurch Street and thence forwarded on. Now, even if the telegraph clerk's education and knowledge of the aristocracy had not brought him to the point of understanding the relation between this event and the representation of Leatherby, the event would certainly be notified

in next morning's papers. I proposed, therefore, to walk into Leatherby and announce myself at once, but Mr Paterson suggested that all I could announce was that I had asked Mr Sheepshanks to support me and had only so far got a conditional answer, and this objection to immediate action seemed unanswerable.

However, the address was completed to our mutual satisfaction and despatched by messenger to Mr Handsaw, the Leatherby agent, to be sent up in charge of a trusty messenger by the evening train to town, and thence carried to a certain printing-office, which was warned by telegraph of his coming. The needful copies could thus be printed off during the night and brought down by early train the next morning, ready for posting up soon after mid-day, if the Treasury whip's reply should be auspicious.

Messrs Rupert Bowles, Scrap, and Hunter came to dinner; the evening would have been a dull one without them, for both our host and his daughter were almost silent, and Mr Paterson was tired after his night's journey. But Mr Bowles, a hale man with snow-white hair and whiskers, a ruddy face and dark eyes, kept us all from going to sleep, speaking in a loud cheery voice with a somewhat provincial, or, at least, homely accent. Mr Scrap was a tall, thin, gentlemanly-looking man, with a long, slightly-hooked nose, a stoop, and a double neckcloth and high shirt-collar that must have been worth ever so much per annum as a professional advertisement.

A lawyer with that neck-tie must be a safe adviser. No direct allusions were made to the matter in hand so long as Miss Sheepshanks or the servants remained in the room; but afterwards the conversation came round at once to the point, and it was surprising to see the unreserved way in which the two visitors accepted me upon trust; whether it was the effect of Mr Paterson's recommendation, or the all-sufficiency of being Mr Sheepshanks' nominee, certainly they never even so much as put me through my paces, but seemed to regard the whole matter as settled. "You must stand up for the old place, Captain West," said Mr Bowles; "Lord Wraymouth has always been a true friend to us. There's young Slowe, Dr Slowe's son, a clerk in the post-office, and doing uncommonly well I'm told, and Humphries too in the Poor Law Board, and quite high up in it now:" and he went on to enumerate various other preferments conferred, from which it appeared that Lord Wraymouth, who in the course of his long public career had been the round of almost all the state departments, without ever rising, however, to the top of any, had left behind him a legacy in each, in the shape of a son of some deserving inhabitant, including, as Mr Bowles might have added, but did not at the time, that promising member of the civil service, Mr Rupert Bowles, junior, or, as he styled himself on his card, Mr R. Podger Bowles (Mrs Bowles was a Miss Podger), a clerk in the Treasury,

and regarded by the rising generation of Leatherby as the personification of London fashion, whose name appeared every year in the list of visitors at Lady Elizabeth Merrifield's receptions, and other distinguished entertainments.

I ventured to observe that these recognitions of Leatherby merit most probably dated from a time prior to the introduction of open competition, and Mr Bowles admitted that 'these were degenerate days; whereon we fell to discussing the hunting capabilities of the country, and the chances of finding some place in the neighbourhood where Mrs West and I could settle down for the winter. Mr Scrap's remarks during our little private conversation by the tea-table turned principally on the desire of Mrs Scrap to become better acquainted with me, and the regard she had always entertained for Eva. Politeness prevented my replying that I had never heard Eva express any similar feeling, nor could I remember indeed having seen that lady among the numerous callers during our visit.

There was, of course, some talk about the prospect of a contested election, and I found it was generally understood that the other party would at least try to bring Drew forward; but Mr Scrap was very decided that he had not the ghost of a chance, while Mr Bowles doubted whether he would be got to face the expense. Not a word, by the way, was said about the expenses on our side, but I knew this matter

might safely be left in Mr Paterson's hands, and, moreover, felt perfectly indifferent about it.

The next morning was beautiful enough to tempt the veriest sluggard from his bed, much less a man who had not yet lost the habit of early rising; but I had scarcely dressed, and was stepping into the garden, when the servant handed me a telegram from Mr Paterson's room which had just arrived, and to receive which the old gentleman had been awakened an hour before his proper time. It was from Herries: "Glissereene entirely agrees, and thinks the proposed arrangement very suitable." Glissereene was the Treasury whip. Here, then, were all the obstacles removed so far as could be seen. My success so far seemed wonderful. I was obliged to take a sharp turn round the garden to keep down the elation of spirits this news caused, and, on returning, found Mr Sheepshanks coming out for his morning stroll, for he too was an early man. He admitted that there was now no longer any need for concealment, and I therefore arranged to walk into Leatherby, there being just time to get there for Miss Barton's half-past eight o'clock breakfast, and Mr Paterson would pick me up on his way to catch the ten o'clock train. After all it would be a cheap bit of candour, for the news would probably not get beyond aunt Emily's household before the afternoon, and the handbills and posters were due from town by two. Accordingly, bidding appropriate adieus to

my hosts, I set off in the fresh morning air along the dusty road, passing on my way the celebrated spot whence, looking back, you see the view which reminded Deedes, R.A., of the Trossachs.

The household in Church Street were at prayers when I arrived, as I could infer from Hannah's stealthy movement out of the parlour to answer my knock, and from the fact that her sister, the cook, was discovered in that apartment on my entry there. My appearance excited of course much surprise, and I had to assure everybody several times over that no accident had happened either to Eva or Sybil, or even to Annette. Mary Drew was absent, having gone on a visit to friends at Stampton, so, as I sat down to breakfast with the two elder ladies, my news was the easier to tell; but it took some time for them to apprehend its purport clearly, if indeed Miss Honoria understood what it was about after all, which seemed doubtful. Under the circumstances I felt no scruple in asking them to say nothing on the matter till they should hear of it from outside, which would be early in the afternoon when the address arrived from town. This would give my supporters the satisfaction of being the first to communicate the news. Breakfast over, the carriage with Mr Paterson called to pick me up, and I started with him for town, leaving the aunts in great joy at the prospect of their nieces' speedy return.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN IMPOSING RECEPTION.

"Now then, girls, array yourselves in purple and orange; summon Annette and produce your choicest garments in those colours; or, if you are not provided, let us sally forth and procure them forthwith. A dress of orange, say, with a purple scarf, and a purple bonnet with orange flowers; something in that style would look neat and expressive, wouldn't it? Anyhow there is not a moment to be lost, for we must all repair to the scene of war to-morrow at the very latest."

"What nonsense you talk, Charlie! as if we could possibly make ourselves into such frights. But do you really mean that you have been elected? I shall be so pleased——"

"Why, not exactly elected, my love; you go too fast, you little thing; but everything has been settled satisfactorily, and I am to stand for the borough, and you must come with me at once to help to carry on the canvass."

This announcement took place, after greetings on my arrival, in the drawing-room in Sackville Street; and then explaining matters to Sybil, who had so far heard nothing of the reason for my absence, I produced a copy of the poster which had been sent from the printing-office, wherein the electors of Leatherby were informed in purple letters on a flaming yellow ground that their very faithful and obedient servant, Charles West, presumed to invite their suffrages for the representation of the borough to fill the vacancy caused by the removal of their noble and respected member to the responsibilities of a seat in the Upper House of Parliament. That he could not express his political sentiments more clearly than by saying that they were generally in accord with those of their esteemed member and fellow-townsman, Mr Sheepshanks, and of the great party to whose efforts and measures so much of the prosperity of the country and the manufacturing interests was due. And so forth, according to received practice. Also, that administrative reform would always receive his cordial support, especially such measures as were needed for organising the military forces of the country on a basis of improved efficiency and greater economy. Finally, the candidate stated that, although a comparative stranger himself, he was connected with Leatherby by family ties, and hoped now to become a member of their society in every sense.

The indefatigable Herries accompanied us on our

journey the next morning. "I'll see you started properly," he said, "and then you must take your own line for the war-ministership." Mrs Herries came also to see the fun; and the three ladies, without exactly adopting the costume I had suggested, were yet attired in a manner sufficiently pronounced to denote their connection with the candidate. But any colour would become Eva, or Sybil either; and Mrs Herries, flushed and happy at being allowed to accompany her husband anywhere, looked handsomer than ever.

But we were not at all prepared for the greeting that awaited us at Leatherby, where, as the train drew up, a discordant clang almost enough to frighten the engine burst forth from the town band, intended to do duty for "See, the conquering hero comes," but with improvised variations on each instrument. On the platform, set off by a background of a purple and orange banner, stood the candidate's committee:— Mr Rupert Bowles, his brother, Mr William Bowles, Mr Scrap, Mr Handsaw, Mr Hunter, Messrs St Leger and Gernel, the bankers, Mr Hambrowe, the wine merchant of Fore Street, Mr Tawney, the wine merchant of Stampton Street, Messrs Dyapur and Ruche, the leading drapers, Mr Staine, the upholsterer, Mr Prymekut, the leading butcher, and others too numerous to mention. "There can't be anybody to speak of left for a committee on the other side," whispered Herries, "even if they try to get one up." Then, as

we stepped on to the platform, Mr Rupert Bowles moved forward, and I shook hands with all the committee, and then introduced them to Eva, who, looking very pretty and shy, shook hands all round; and then Sybil, also looking very pretty and shy, shook hands all round too, while a select deputation of small boys, who had managed to get on to the platform, cried Hooray! and were immediately chased off by the one policeman. Outside the station we found Mrs Scrap in her pony-carriage, herself and the ponies ablaze with orange ribbons, and Eva was invited to take the vacant seat, while Sybil and Mrs Herries were assisted into the Three Butts fly, which awaited us with the Fergusson mare and her companion similarly decorated. The whole distance from the station to the Three Butts being rather less than a quarter of a mile, the ladies would fain have walked up after us, but it was represented that this would mar the effect; whereas however it was intended that the carriages should drive on and pull up with a splash at the Three Butts, thus announcing our advent, it happened that the procession was formed and in motion before the ladies were ready to start, and the street being somewhat narrow the carriages were unable to pass, and so brought up the rear of our procession, to wit:—

A purple banner with orange streamers, borne by two men.

Band of seven performers, all performing vigorously

and independently, supported by juvenile attendants on either side.

Two youths carrying flags.

The candidate, arm-in-arm with Messrs Rupert Bowles and Scrap.

Mr Herries, on the same friendly terms with Messrs William Bowles and Hunter.

The rest of the committee.

Various residents of the borough, for the most part disqualified for exercise of the franchise by reason of their tender age.

Mrs Scrap's pony-phaeton.

The Three Butts fly.

The whole effect must have been inexpressibly ludicrous, but I could not venture to look round. From various houses streamers were suspended, useful rather as indicating the proclivities of the owners than remarkable for size or as works of design; but from the second floor of Messrs Dyapur and Ruche's establishment, which faced the inn just at the entrance into the Fore Street, and at its widest part, quite a balloon of coloured calico floated out in the air. "You see, Captain," said Mr Dyapur, when the procession stopped, "you didn't give us much time for preparation, but we've done our best." I was just going to observe that I hoped it would wash, when the idea suddenly struck me that perhaps this was one of the items to be included in the election bill, and that utilitarian questions of this sort would

be held to savour of meanness unworthy of a right-thinking candidate, so I held my peace.

At the open windows of the Three Butts, in the rooms which had been engaged for us, were to be seen both the two Mrs Bowles and other ladies, all more or less in a glory of orange and purple. There must have been quite a run on Messrs Dyapur's stock that morning. Miss Barton, too, we were told, was waiting within, but would not appear. The ladies here stopped, while the procession continued its way to the public rooms, where a meeting was held, Mr Sheepshanks in the chair, consisting of about a hundred people, and where I was introduced to the electors or such of them as were present, and proposed by Mr Scrap, and seconded by Mr Dyapur. I had of course to make a speech, and very nervous I felt at starting lest I should break down on this first occasion. Luckily the excitement and movement had prevented my thinking too much about it beforehand, and I got through the affair well enough. There was plenty to be said, and I had not to beat about for topics; and although probably the speech was jerky and inartistic, still it was well received, and its success gave me confidence for the future. I had accomplished the feat of speaking on my legs and without premeditation. There was plenty more of this to be done before the election was over, especially open-air speaking; and it appeared to me that there were two leading principles which if acted on

were always successful—namely, to be free and jocular in the smaller meetings, where the audience consisted mainly of the local tradesmen, but in the open-air assemblies of operatives to be extremely polite and deferential. I commend this method to all intending candidates.

The meeting was followed by a public banquet for the Liberal party at the Three Buts—three-and-sixpence a-head, wine and spirits not included—which was perhaps the greatest infliction undergone during the canvass. Such an afternoon's work did not conduce to hunger; about twice as many people were stuffed into the room as it could properly hold, and several of my worthy supporters took the opportunity of the jollification to make a regular night of it, sending for pipes and tobacco, and standing glasses round in succession, till the atmosphere of smoke and gin became almost insupportable. The eating began at five, and was over before the autumn twilight had faded away, soon after which Mr Sheepshanks retired; but it was near midnight when I managed to get away, a select party remaining to the last, whose encouraging prophecies of the result of the election followed me almost out of the room. "We'll carry you through, Captain," said one jolly farmer, who in virtue of being also a butcher had a shop and a borough vote, as he stood in front of the door waving his pipe with one hand, and holding on to the wainscot with the other to steady himself; "and don't you

be afeard of this talk about Squire Drew. He ain't no good for 'lectioneering; he'll never a-bring hisself to making free with his coin. He's that close he couldn't screw hisself to do it. I don't mind a-saying it, though I do rent a bit of his land; I don't care a brass farden about him, I don't, and if I meets him this here very night, I'll say it to his face, just I'm a-saying it to you. He is a mean one, he is, and so I'll tell him if I meets him. Don't you be afeard, Captain, we'll 'lect you right enough; and as for Squire Drew"—but at this point I succeeded in effecting my escape, quite satisfied of my friend's pot-valiancy in his present condition, when he was like a dragon, breathing forth spirits, whatever might happen should he meet the Squire next day, and feeling that the occasion was not propitious for argument about Mr Drew's personal qualities. Escaping from the banquet, I went to Church Street to fetch Eva, and found all the party in the little drawing-room, tired out with sitting up for me so much beyond the hour at which Miss Barton's household was accustomed to retire to rest. I would fain have let Eva stay in this quiet shelter, knowing too that the whole inn must be reeking with the odours of the feast; but this retirement was not admissible under the circumstances, and we had taken a suite of rooms at the Three Butts, comprising, in fact, the first floor. "We so much wanted you and your sweet wife to stay with us at Holly Lodge," Mr

Scrap had said on our arrival, "and dear Miss Barton can hardly be equal to entertaining such a party, but Mr Scrap thought it might be inconvenient to you just now to be so far in the country. The country is indeed very charming; but then this country visiting is so fatiguing, the distances are so great. Fancy, Captain West, we are five miles from the next county family;" and in truth it was just that distance by the road from Roodeley, Squire Garnett's place, to the gate of Mrs Scrap's shrubbery, which was situated at the end of South Lane, one of the terminations of Leatherby.

So far our side had had it all their own way, but the opposition were gathering their forces for a fight. Scarcely had my blue and yellow posters, following close after the news of Lord Stowe's death, astonished the town, when the holders of what they called sound opinions, recovering their surprise, began to marshal their forces. A deputation, it appeared, had gone out to Squire Drew's the very evening of my previous visit, and again early the following day, when they succeeded in overcoming any remaining scruples; and accordingly, the morning after the banquet, when I looked out of my dressing-room window at the Three Butts, there on a hoarding opposite, and side by side with my own, was another large poster, in which their very humble and obedient servant John Drew requested the support of the electors of Leatherby in favour of the only political principles which could

appeal to an enlightened and patriotic constituency. However, his committee had not had time to get up their announcement on coloured paper, which circumstance was deemed to confer a moral superiority on my side, especially by the juvenile portion of the population; but very soon an opposition band, adorned with light blue and pink, came down the street, making if possible even more hideous sounds than ours, and arousing poor Eva from her slumbers; and both parties went hard into canvassing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ELECTION.

Mr Fergusson, as Herries had predicted, did not come forward as an ostensible partisan on Drew's committee, but privately was very active, as became his character, and was indeed the most respectable member of the other side; for the resident gentry, such of them as belonged to the male sex, were generally indifferent about the matter, and the tradespeople could not afford to think differently in politics from the factory hands. But of course we were capital friends notwithstanding. "We are quite torn by conflicting emotions," said Miss Kate, when Eva and I paid them an early call. "Of course we should like you to win, on your own account as well as on Eva's; but then you know, as papa says, one's political principles must be put before everything. Oh, Captain West! why could you not be on the right side, and then all this bother would never have occurred? Even the little household in Church Street had its rival factions. "Come along, Sybil,"

said I, entering the schoolroom; "come and help Eva. We have to go all round the town to-day. You and she have to kiss all the ugly babies, and I have to do the same by the pretty women. Such, I am informed, is the correct programme. But what do I see here, pink and blue rosettes mixed with our noble colours! Can it be that even here too the demon-paw of party obtrudes its venom fang, as Mr Rupert Bowles so beautifully expressed it at the meeting yesterday?"

I was answered by the entry of Mary Drew into the room, who it appeared had returned from her visit the day before. "We are having a match, you see, Captain West, which can make up rosettes fastest. Sybil is thirty-five against my twenty-six, but then she had a long start. You mustn't join, Eva—two against one would not be fair. Aunt Emily has promised to be neutral, so let Sybil and me fight it out together."

"Oh, my dear," replied Eva, who had now followed me into the room, "you needn't be afraid of my helping. I feel as if I could hardly stand already, and I couldn't hold a needle if I tried ever so. This canvassing is capital fun, but dreadfully tiring."

"You mustn't let Eva over-fatigue herself," said Mary; "and after all there is no need to take much trouble, for papa says it is all humbug his contesting the election, for he hasn't a chance. Dear me! I ought not to have told you this, but I daresay it is

no secret; however, we mean to fight to the death," and so saying the young lady sat down and resumed her occupation of fabricating opposition rosettes.

Eva was happily spared further exertion that morning by the arrival of Mrs Scrap in her pony-phaeton to carry her off to spend the day; and the lady further insisted on picking me up in the street later in the morning, while engaged upon my canvass, and driving me down to the great luncheon-party held at Holly Lodge in honour of the Liberal candidate. "Your wife is the same sweet little thing as ever," said Mrs Scrap, a comely little woman with sharp features and an eager face, as we drove along. "I have always been so fond of her, and I was saying to Missie" (Missie was the eldest Miss Scrap, *æt.* fifteen) "only this morning what an acquisition she would be to our Leatherby society; for although, of course, one looks mainly to the county for one's company, still in Mr Scrap's position we are obliged to keep on good terms with the townspeople. Indeed," she added, suddenly recollecting, I presume, the existence of the household in Church Street, "there are some most estimable residents in the town, really quite desirable acquaintances, but the double tie makes the claims of society very engrossing. I have often wanted Mr Scrap to give up Holly Lodge and move somewhere farther into the country; but business is business, you know, Captain West—one is obliged to think of these things." I might have

replied that Mrs West was at least four inches taller than herself, but I understood her expression to be meant rather in a moral than a physical sense, and that my wife was regarded for the present as somebody to be half patronised and half looked up to and made much of.

During the luncheon, which was a very long affair, the room being full of guests, including various carriage company as well as townsfolk—Mrs Scrap was particular in notifying for my information that the former kept *their* carriages, apparently to prevent it being supposed that they kept the carriages of anybody else—our hostess was too preoccupied and anxious for conversation, and her comely face grew flushed as the courses went by, in consumption of the good things provided, and in pressing them on the guests. Eventually, as the eating came to an end, Mrs Scrap found time to offer her kindly advice about our future plans. She was so glad to hear that we meant to settle at Leatherby; for although they all liked Lord Wraymouth very much, still it would be so nice to have the second member a resident: dear good Mr Sheepshanks was a most estimable person, still he could not be said to do much for society, and dear Miss Sheepshanks had not been brought up to that sort of thing. Mrs West, of course, would entertain, and no doubt her parties would be charming, although she (Mrs Scrap) could assure me that these pleasures were not without

their anxieties, which, indeed, having observed my hostess's face during the meal, and the frowns at and whisperings to the servants, I could well understand. But then dear Mrs West had not any family cares at present to oppress her. What with Missie's education and the younger ones, and Adolphus, really it was an anxious task. She hardly knew what to do about Missie's music—the child had so much taste it would be a thousand pities not to cultivate it, wouldn't it? And although Dr Phewgew was no doubt a very sound musician, still he had not the style of a London master. She really must get Mr Scrap to let her take Missie to town next year for the season to finish her education. And then she should hope to see a great deal of dear Mrs West. Then there was Adolphus. I had not seen Adolphus yet; he had just gone back to school; she was so sorry she had not been able to introduce him to me. He was such a noble boy. Yes, she believed the Leatherby school was very well, and Adolphus went there when he was a little fellow, but the society was very miscellaneous, so many of the trades-people sent their sons there, which made it very awkward, I knew, and so it was better he should go to Harrow. She would have preferred sending him to Eton, but Harrow was quite as expensive, and Mr Sheepshanks' grandson, young Cramer, was at Harrow, and the two boys were such friends. What form was he in? Well, he was not quite sure what form he

was in, but thought it was the fifth, or it might be the fourth form; at any rate his tutor wrote home excellent accounts of him, and said there was not a more gentlemanly boy in his house. Young Lord Lolly Poppe was in the same house, second son of the Marquis of Jinjerbredde—such a gentlemanly youth. Should I find it difficult to get a place to settle down in? Well, Mr Scrap would be only too happy to help me to look out for something; they had found it very difficult, but then they wanted so much; and when at last Mr Scrap bought Holly Lodge, it was such a tumble-down place that she told him she really thought they could not live in it; but by building out a new drawing-room and two best bedrooms, and adding a conservatory, and turning the old drawing-room into a schoolroom, and converting the attics into nurseries, they had managed to make it do. "But then, you know, Captain West, you have no nurseries or governess to provide for, have you? But won't you come now and look at the conservatory?"

Thus it will be seen that everybody seemed to take my election for granted; nevertheless the business went on as if the election were to be hotly contested; and what between speeches out of window, and speeches in the public rooms, and committee meetings, and the work of personal canvassing, there was enough to be done. I cannot say I found the personal canvass at all disagreeable. The minor

tradesmen, indeed, between a sort of natural obsequiousness and the independence simulated for the occasion, were not very easy to get on with; I always felt when calling on them as if we both understood that this political talk was all humbug at bottom, and that real business would have consisted in a handsome order for tobacco, or shoes, or almonds and raisins, or whatever the article on hand might be; and this one could not do just at present for certain considerations. I confess, too, I should have been better pleased if the leading committee-men had put me through my facings, so to speak, before taking up my cause so heartily, instead of letting it be seen so plainly that I was adopted merely as Mr Sheepshanks' nominee, and not on the score of any personal merit. But one must not look a gift horse in the mouth; and I found the operatives thoroughly pleasant fellows to talk to, independent yet civil, and although full of prejudice and disposed to be over-conceited about their knowledge, yet intelligent and shrewd withal. I gave no pledges and asked for no promises, but made no secret of my opinions; and I must say I found the arguments one used to get into with some of these good fellows very useful for fixing my own ideas, as well as for the new light in which they presented things; while they for their part appeared both surprised and gratified to find a soldier thinking the army might be more efficient and yet cheaper. Their wives, too, were a civil but

apparently thriftless set, who seemed to understand thoroughly the art of making a little money go a very short way, and spent without much to show for it enough to keep a poor gentleman in comfort. There used to be a certain amount of looking round from behind back-doors, accompanied by sniggering, on the part of the numerous young ladies dwelling in these parts who were employed as factory hands, and they seemed hardly to know whether to be civil or saucy to Eva when she accompanied me on my rounds; but on the whole I liked what I saw of the people, and we became very good friends. Eva and Sybil began very actively with the canvassing at first, but the former was soon obliged to give up the work from fatigue. For so long as she held out, her gracious presence as she walked down these back streets like a gentle, modest queen, had a very good effect. Sybil was a less useful ally, perhaps, as people were accustomed to see her going about in the school-girl state.

Meanwhile the two committees carried on the war, and various squibs, as well as addresses, soon decorated the available wall space, of a style quite adapted to the mental calibre of the readers to be edified. I remember one in particular, notifying that the celebrated West Indian juggler (the West in italics, of course), would have the honour of exhibiting his tricks to the Leatherby public, including his remarkable personation of the character of a Liberal

(also in italics) country gentleman; and how, finally, this juggler would conclude his entertainment by vanishing just before the polling-day. Whereupon our side came out with a report of the meeting of the Stampton Agricultural Benevolent Society, Squire Screw in the chair, when half-a-crown and a new smock was presented to John Hodge, for having brought up a family of fifteen children without aid from the parish. Also a notice to the effect that Squire Screw had announced his intention of subscribing half-a-sovereign to be divided between the Leatherby Infirmary and the Literary and Scientific Institution. What wag composed these *jeux d'esprit* I do not know, and I declare they were posted up without my sanction. We had most of them defaced, but they appear to have been much relished by the community, and were pronounced more telling, if less witty, than the opposition devices.

Happily the principals on either side bore the attacks good-humouredly, and we continued to be capital friends. "Here, at any rate, is neutral ground," said a voice from the corner of Miss Barton's drawing-room, as I entered it one evening towards dusk, and dimly discerned Drew sitting there with the ladies; "we can meet here at any rate without exchanging haughty salutations, as we have to do in the streets; only it would never do to let our committees know anything about it. Mine would set me down as a traitor for certain, and I daresay yours would too.

What a joke it is, to be sure, at least for me! I knew I hadn't a ghost of a chance, and my committee know it too; but for goodness' sake don't let them know I said so. I must carry on a bit longer for the look of the thing, but it will be no good holding out much more."

"For shame, papa," said his daughter, "to be so downhearted; you ought not to encourage Captain West in that way. For my part, I think we have a capital chance, and Mr Fergusson was in great spirits about it this morning."

"Fergusson was only humbugging you girls; he knows all about it really. But appearances must be kept up. See me out of doors, and I can swagger with any of them. But I am not telling Captain West any secrets. He knows how the land lies just as well as I do, and there is no use in playing at hoax in here."

"Well, papa, all I can say is, it's a great shame. I don't feel so very sorry on your account, because I know you would be miserable in London; but it would be so nice for you to have been an M.P. just for once. Besides, of course, we wanted the good cause to triumph. If Captain West had only belonged to the right side!—oh, dear! what a pity it is! Mr Fergusson was saying he never could have supposed you were such a Radical, Captain West. I suppose he never said anything about it to you, Eva, did he, before you were married?"

"My dear, I knew nothing about Tories or Radicals in those days, and I don't know much more about them now; but I wish Charlie could be an M.P. without going into Parliament. It's very nice being an M.P., I daresay; but how anybody can like going to Parliament, I am sure I can't think. We went there one evening, and you ought to have seen the place they put us into. And oh! such tiresome stuff as they talked!"

Mr Drew had not at all understated his chance of success. There really was no effectual opposition; and almost before the writ came down for the election, a placard appeared in which, while thanking his many friends for the generous support they had accorded, he considered that the present condition of the Conservative interests in the borough did not justify his proceeding to the poll; and therefore, while hinting darkly that on the next occasion they would have an overwhelming majority on their side, he would for the present withdraw from the contest. It was very foolish, he afterwards remarked to me, to allow himself to be persuaded into coming forward at all. They need not try it again.

"Didn't like to put his hand in his pocket," said Mr Rupert Bowles, when discussing the matter in committee; "Drew's an awful close fellow."

"He's fond of money, is Drew," replied his brother; "but he can spend it too sometimes. Look at that right-of-way case of his which he lost at the Yewcester

assizes, with special jury and the Attorney-General got down special, and then fought out in the Queen's Bench. It must have cost him a precious lot before he had done with it. But Drew don't like throwing money away any more than most folks, and that's what he was doing here. He wouldn't have polled a couple of hundred votes. He didn't pull up a bit too soon, to my thinking."

Anyhow, the result was, that on Drew's retirement no one else was found bold enough to take up his place; and in a few days I found myself returned unopposed, with but a very moderate bill to pay, and no doubts of imputations or petitions in reserve to qualify the full pleasure of success.

CHAPTER XIX.

PROFESSIONAL.

THERE still remained four weary months to wait before entering on my new functions; for although Parliament stood prorogued till November, it was well understood there would be no meeting till February. The young lady looking forward to her first ball; the youngster awaiting the arrival of his first uniform; the little boy counting the days remaining to the holidays in his first half at school; all who have gone through the like experiences can enter into my feelings and state of foolish expectancy. Not that there was any illusion about the matter. I had seen enough from the Speaker's gallery to know what a humdrum affair Parliamentary life was; that by far the larger number of the members took no active part in the proceedings, and that to lay yourself out to be a working member involved weary and dreary hours of waiting about. I could picture to myself quite clearly beforehand just what would happen; how I should probably be very assiduous

in attendance at first, and how my zeal would gradually abate; and how when at last an opportunity should come for an utterance, the result would be of such a commonplace sort, neither failure nor success, that I should be tempted to give up my plan in disgust as not worth all the sacrifice of time and trouble; or how, if I determined to go on, it would be with a full knowledge of the dull plodding life that awaited me, and the awful consumption of time required to produce even a moderate success; time that, given to any other pursuit, might bring at least the solid advantage of self-satisfaction, if not the higher meed of fame.

There were no illusions therefore in my case. The days of heaven-born prime ministers, or even of Sheridans and Cannings, were gone by. Cabinet ministers were nowadays mostly grey-headed men who had gone through a lot of subordinate drudgery; and I looked forward to a thoroughly dull prosaic existence, such as I felt certain it would prove to be even if I were successful. Nevertheless my eagerness to begin was as keen, and my inner feelings as restless, as if the prospect had been one of undiluted social bliss.

However, restlessness would not make February come a bit the sooner. The time had to be got through somehow, and it could not be better spent than in making secure the seat which good fortune had brought me so easily. Clearly we should do well to

spend the winter at Leatherby and endeavour to make ourselves popular for our own sakes. And another piece of luck awaited us, for a suitable house became available just when it was wanted. Mrs Scrap called early one morning in Church Street, whither we had now moved, to tell us that Mr Scrap had just received instructions from the Misses Harington to let their place for the winter, those elderly ladies having been advised to visit the south of France; and accordingly in a day or two we found ourselves tenants of Dingwell, a comfortable but unromantic-looking house about a mile out of the town, with a prim garden, three or four acres of ground, an eminently respectable and plethoric butler of whom Eva from the first was thoroughly afraid, an equally respectable and venerable housemaid, a ditto cook, a cross gardener, a stolid coachman, and two fat horses drawing a chariot in which the Misses Harington were wont three times a-week to take so much of the air as found its way through the little windows, above which those ladies' noses could just be seen; two cows, an apoplectic spaniel accustomed also to take exercise in the chariot, and a splendid Persian cat. It must have cost the sisters a pang to part with these treasures, still more to make them over to the care of strangers; but, on the other hand, it was a great object to the owners to find tenants prepared to take over the establishment as it stood: and when, on our calling to see the place the Persian

cat after brief negotiations jumped straightway into Eva's lap, Miss Harington pronounced that the arrangement was clearly providential, and Mr Scrap had little difficulty in completing the transfer. We for our part could have preferred a lighter equipage, and generally a more cheerful household; but it was of course a great advantage to find one ready organised, and available for just the time we wanted to occupy it. Accordingly there remained nothing to be done but to order the butler to obtain supplies as usual, thus in effect retaining that domestic tyrant in command; and we entered into possession, merely allowing a decent interval to elapse after the departure of our landladies on their tour.

Meanwhile I took the opportunity to run up to town for a day or two on schedule business, first, however, performing one of the functions of my new office. The day after my return was announced, I received a note from the grammar school, in which honourable and dear sir was requested in conformity with the ancient usage of this loyal borough to obtain a whole holiday for the boys of this ancient foundation. This appeal, which was written in a fine round hand with splendid flourishes in Mr Aborn the writing-master's best style, was signed Thomas Provest, head monitor, and William Dyapur, captain of the eleven; and on receiving it I went straightway down to the school, and being met at the lodge by the porter, that official donned an old blue gown, and

conducting me across the green to the school-house, went in and announced my arrival; whereupon, following the order prescribed by tradition, the two signitaries to the note came out and conducted me to the head-master, who occupied a sort of pulpit at the end of the schoolroom,—the boys being ranged on forms on either side,—after shaking hands with whom, I requested, according to the ancient privilege accorded to a newly elected member, a whole holiday for the school. This request the head-master, who wore his college cap all the time, such it appeared being part of the traditionary ceremony, was pleased generously to assent to; whereupon the boys, notwithstanding that unlike their parents they were all stout Conservatives, sinking politics for the moment, gave three cheers for the new member. I was then introduced to the under-master; the mathematical master (late scholar of Mary Anne Hall, Cambridge, and graduate in mathematical honours; so ran the prospectus, I afterwards heard that he was twenty-ninth junior optime); the French master; and Eva's little friend Mr Aborn the writing-master; and the ceremony concluded by my tipping the signitaries to the letter a guinea each, and subscribing five pounds to the school athletic sports. Five would go seven hundred times into three thousand five hundred, as I told Eva afterwards, a number which in those days seemed practically infinite.

During my visit to town Eva remained with her

aunt. I found that the schedule was still in course of preparation, the court of probate being apparently in no hurry to conclude the affair, and I felt under too great an obligation to my kind friend to urge him to go faster than his wont, while my discreditable anxiety was long ago allayed about any disappearance westward. The American voyage would evidently be made only by his partner, and indeed Herries was now on the point of making a second visit to New York. The firm it appeared were London agents to the great New York and Mexico Railway Company, which gave them an immensity of American business. Before setting off, however, he carried out his promise of giving me a start in the city, which my new position greatly assisted. The name of Captain West, M.P., now appeared on the direction of the Metropolitan and Provincial Bank, and the Agricultural and Commercial Assurance Company; and I took my seat while in town at the board meetings of each, looking properly grave and maintaining solemn silence till I should get into the swing of the business. Both were deemed to be first-class affairs in which I was now a considerable shareholder, and the chairman of the Metropolitan and Provincial was a great financial authority, and a Bank director as well as a county member. Our proceedings at the Board of the Company appeared to consist mainly in sitting round a long table while the applicants for policies presented

themselves in turn before us. Each applicant took a seat by the chairman for a couple of minutes, who put a few jocular questions to him, after which the insurer made his bow and retired, and the proposal papers with our medical officer's opinion were passed round for opinion. This system of requiring personal interviews, I found, was considered the strong point of the Agricultural and Commercial; for whereas in other companies a man could take out a policy after being seen merely by the secretary and medical officer, no one could insure with us without first appearing before the whole board. This, as our prospectus pointed out, afforded a peculiar guarantee to the shareholders for the soundness of the business done; and clearly a machinery of this sort was admirably adapted for detecting bad lives which might impose on our doctor.

The board of the Metropolitan and Provincial was a smaller affair, consisting of six members with the managing director and chairman. The secretary produced a bundle of flimsy papers and a list of discounts made during the week, whereon the managing director, running his fingers through them jauntily, like a conjuror playing with a pack of cards, said, "all quite first-class paper you see, gentlemen," and we all replied "quite so," except one man of independent mind, who said "evidently;" and then there was a ticking off of vouchers, and reading of minutes of the last meeting, and we broke up. For these

exertions the Agricultural paid us each a fee of two guineas, and the bank two and a half. "Looks well, to be on first-class directions of this kind," said Herries that evening, as he took his farewell dinner in Sackville Street preparatory to starting for Liverpool, "and pays your travelling expenses into the bargain," as indeed it did, for a first-class return ticket to Leatherby was only thirty-seven and sixpence.

It was pleasant also to walk into the Union Jack, of which popular establishment I had lately been elected a member, and receive the congratulations of friends and acquaintances. "Holloa, old West!" cried Cobbe Smith, of my regiment; "so you've been and gone and got into Parliament! I congratulate you, my boy. Here's Julian Straight somewhere in the house, and Murphy and little Gatlay; we are all going to dine together; come and join us; and we will have some champagne cooled and drink your health."

"By Jove, West, what a lucky fellow you are!" said Straight, as we settled down to dinner; "an uncle died and left you a hatful of money, isn't it? Dash it, I wish one of my uncles would die and leave me something. But no such luck."

"Well, West," said Cobbe Smith, "you must stick up for the old regiment in Parliament; we shall look to get a lot out of you, mind; you ought to be good for another brigade at least. Not that I want

promotion myself, for I wouldn't lose my troop for anything. Rather be as I am, than a field-officer, any day."

"You may say that, indeed," said Straight. "Look at me. Here have I been, subaltern and captain, seventeen years in the horse artillery, and am now shunted off on promotion to a garrison brigade. And a nice brigade it is, too, one battery at Mahrattapoor, one at Seringapatam, and two at Ormuz, and they won't muster together, all told, the strength of my old horse battery. That was something like a command. But it's just like my luck."

"And which of all these stations are you posted to?"

"I am down for Mahrattapoor; but as they have a colonel and lieutenant-colonel there already I shall hardly be wanted. Two field-officers are about enough to look after one garrison battery. There is a lietuenant-colonel at Seringapatam also, and the other colonel has to be provided for; he is on leave just now. I suppose I shall have to go to Ormuz, and play second fiddle to that duffer Jones. However, there won't be much to do. Jones won't want me to help him in meddling with the captain of the one battery there. I shall be able to get six months' leave every year, that's something."

"Well, Murphy," said Cobbe Smith, "what are they going to do with the regiment, and when are they going to do it? When is this long-incubated

scheme of reorganisation coming off? Give us your confidence, like a trustworthy War Office official as you are. We are badly in want of a shave or two down at Aldershot."

"It is very easy to talk in that glib way, my good sir; but matters of this sort are not so easily settled. This is a large question, this reorganisation. However, there's a committee sitting on it now, and our report, I expect, will go in very soon."

"That makes the twentieth committee at the very least, to my knowledge," said Cobbe Smith, "and there will be twenty more yet, I'll be bound; and at the end of it we shall all be very much where we are now, I expect. We have got a few efficient batteries, and that is about the whole of it."

"It is very easy to talk, young man, but it's a different thing when you come to deal with the thing practically. You will find, however, that this last committee has dealt with the subject exhaustively. Not that I agree with them altogether. Indeed, I have put a paper of my own before the Secretary of State, which he has had under consideration since last May, and which I hope he may take up. I have looked at the thing from every point of view, and the conclusion I come to is, that you must make the battery your administrative unit."

"And do away with the brigade system altogether?"

"Certainly; what good are these brigades?"

"Then you would have two hundred and fifty batteries all working separately, and nothing between them and the Horse —— well, between them and Colonel Murphy?"

"No, not quite that. You would have field-officers commanding stations, of course, and district-adjutants, and so forth, but the regimental records would be kept at headquarters, and there would be one general roster by batteries through the regiment for foreign service."

"Certainly your scheme would be a triumph of decentralisation. I conclude that, of course, you would number the batteries in one list right down through the regiment? Number 250 R.A. would look neat on a man's shoulder-strap; it would be so easy to remember, too."

"For my part," said Straight, "I think if you go in for changes of this sort, you ought to make the horse artillery a distinct service from the rest. At present you may get fellows posted to it as field-officers who have scarcely done a day's duty with it before. Men with no style, who have forgotten how to ride perhaps. Plays the very deuce with the horse artillery, that sort of thing does."

"At any rate that practice gives the garrison brigades the inestimable benefit of the occasional presence of a horse artillery officer, as in your case, Straight."

"And I hope the horse artillery will have the same benefit too, soon, by getting me back again."

"But why should there be an artillery regiment at all?" asked Cobbe Smith.

"What! an army without artillery?"

"I don't mean that exactly. But why should all the artillery be in one regiment any more than all the cavalry or all the infantry?"

"Break up the old regiment?" cried Straight. "Oh, confound it, man, you couldn't do that! Oh, dash it, no! you must keep the old regiment together. Whatever you do, you must do that."

"Where's the necessity?"

"Why, you would break down all our *esprit de corps* altogether if you were to split us up into different regiments. Oh, confound it, man, it would never do to break up the old regiment!"

"Well, but this old regiment, as you call it, has after all been joined together for only about ten years. And as to the *esprit de corps*, does it depend on our being all promoted on one seniority list? And where are the signs of that close bond of brotherhood among your sixteen hundred brother officers that you speak of? Do you yourself, Straight, know even a tenth of them personally?"

"I should rather think not," said Straight, drawing himself up, and pulling his moustache, "nor yet a twentieth, and don't want to." Straight was by way of being a swell both regimental and otherwise, and perhaps would hardly have cared to dine at the Union Jack with a junior captain if he had not been

also an M.P. As for Colonel Murphy, he could be quite affable with his brother officers when on business, or if there was no better company available, and this being October the Club was empty; at other times a regimental party of this sort would hardly have been in his line, for it was quite understood by the regiment that he moved in a superior circle, as became a distinguished official and man about town.

"Well, then," continued Cobbe Smith, "I fail to perceive the force of your objection, Straight; and it seems to me that common-sense points to the need for dealing with our regiment as you would with any other branch of the service. Why should you not have fifteen or twenty artillery regiments of a handy, manageable size, just as you have regiments of cavalry and infantry?"

"Ah! but the case is very different," observed Murphy; "you don't want to have entire regiments of artillery stationed at different places. You must have your batteries scattered about. A regimental system such as you propose would never work."

"But are not the other branches of the service scattered about too? How many regiments of cavalry are there serving at home which are not distributed by detachments? Yet we don't find that the regimental system fails to work with them."

"Yes; but then the artillery is a different service altogether. Besides, you would have all sorts

of irregularities and differences creeping into the drill and system. You must have uniformity in the artillery."

"And that you think would be secured by organising the regiment as a congeries of independent batteries?"

"Not by the independent batteries, but by having one centre of administration and one headquarters. If you had separate regiments they would be wanting to have different equipments, and then differences in drill and system would be sure to arise. No, depend on it, if you are to maintain uniformity in your artillery, you must keep it as one regiment."

"Yet we don't find the infantry and cavalry breaking out in different patterns of rifles and sabres, because they are divided off. If you serve out only one kind of gun and one kind of shell to the artillery they will have to use it; and as for uniformity of system, you may secure that by proper inspections."

"But if you had separate regiments," broke in Straight, "you might have a man promoted before you who came out of Woolwich below you. That would never do."

"Why shouldn't it? In the other branches of the service men don't continue through life to stand in the order of their first commissions. And it is considered quite lawful for the artillery to supersede the engineers who beat them at the Academy. After all, the chances of good luck would be the same for

everybody. You might be one of the lucky ones yourself, Straight."

"Oh, don't talk to me about luck, my dear fellow. Just fancy, if I had been a captain in the Crimea, instead of being just at the top of the lieutenants, I should have got my brevet majority to a certainty, for I landed a week before the place fell; and I should have been sure of my lieutenant-colonelcy and C.B. for India, and should have been a brevet colonel years ago, and very likely a brigadier-general at this moment; and here I am a bare regimental lieutenant-colonel, and not even a battery to command. There never was such luck."

"I'll tell you what, West," said Murphy in an undertone, "now that you have got into Parliament you may possibly have something to say to the settlement of these matters. I daresay they will put you on to any select committee that may be appointed about the regiment. I should like you to read my memorandum on the subject. I will send it you to-morrow, and I should be glad to talk the matter over with you any time that you care to look in at the office."

Murphy, it appeared to me, behaved during this little party like a man of the world who was prepared to recognise the altered relations produced by a seat in the House of Commons, however much such a distinction might jar against his sense of the innate fitness of things. Straight, on the other hand, seemed

to regard my good fortune as a sort of personal grievance, second only to his transfer to the foot artillery, or any scheme for the disruption of the old regiment. But at this point of the conversation, the former descried Lord Kewrasse of the household cavalry coming into the coffee-room, and rose at once to engage that popular young officer in conversation. As Straight did not know Lord Kewrasse, and did not apparently relish Murphy's desertion, he pleaded an engagement and moved off too, and Cobbe Smith and Gatlay and myself adjourned to the smoking-room.

CHAPTER XX.

A MODEL M.P.

RETURNING to Leatherby, Eva and I moved into our new residence, and I went to work to drown in occupation the impatient longing I felt for the consummation of my new position. The intervening three months and a fraction would clearly be best spent by fulfilling in a proper manner the new *rôle* of borough member, and this accordingly I set about doing vigorously. The first thing was to subscribe liberally to the Leatherby Hunt, and to join in that pastime; and I got down a couple of lively nags on job from town, also a pony and little carriage for Eva, which made her independent on fine days of the chariot, so that this ancient vehicle could be reserved mainly for taking us out to dinner-parties, or for conveying her aunts to and fro when they came out to see us. As for the hunting, it was passable enough, but I confess I did not take to it very kindly. The meet was well enough, especially as Eva would sometimes drive me there, or sometimes ride to see

the hounds throw off, and the run was splendid fun when we had one, although the Yewcestershire country was not good; but the concomitants, to my thinking, outweighed the pleasure. To find yourself at the end of a December day eighteen or twenty miles from home, on a tired horse, was about as dreary a prospect as could be conceived. Some people can think on horseback, and so pass the time agreeably; I never could. I can think with a pen in my hand, or in a railway train, the motion of which, I think, produces a sort of exaltation of the brain. Many a fine debate have I carried on when going down in the Leatherby express, putting, of course, sophistical argument of the feeblest kind into the mouths of my opponents, and then exposing them in terse and forcible speeches; but when riding home from hunting I never could do anything but look forward to the milestones when it was light enough to see them, or else peer out into the gloom for any visible marks to indicate my progress homewards. Nor were the dinner-parties much better; the Miss Haringtons' horses being good for about seven miles an hour, and the visiting distances enormous, a considerable part of our winter nights seemed to be spent in plodding over the Yewcestershire lanes in the yellow chariot, which had not done so much service for years.

Then there was the borough business. I had been nominated joint-patron with Mr Sheepshanks of the

Leatherby Literary and Scientific Institution, and took the chair on various occasions—it was understood that my colleague was to be deemed exempt from all petty work of this kind—notably when Mr R. Podger Bowles gave his elegant lecture on Rome, entitled "Recreations of an Overworked Official," a lecture delivered by the young Treasury swell with great self-possession to a crowded and attentive audience, the great hall of the Institution which holds nearly a hundred people being full to overflowing, and all the young ladies of Leatherby in the front rows in their best bonnets; and again when young Harry Perkins read his Essay on the Genius of Modern Poesy. Mrs Scrap, next to whom I had the honour of sitting on this last occasion, remarked that it was really quite gratifying to see how well Mrs Perkins, who was a most respectable person, had brought up her son, and that the spread of education among all classes of people was a remarkable sign of the age, We supped afterwards at the Fergussons', and the only unkindly thing I ever noticed in that family was that scarcely any allusion was made to the lecture, although Harry Perkins was evidently longing to hear something said about it; so that I was glad to feel in a position as late chairman and present member to rise at the table and propose the health of our able essayist, leading off three cheers with effusion, which ceremony made the poor lad quite happy for the rest of the evening, and I doubt not converted

him into a fast friend. Politically Harry Perkins was my supporter already, although not yet in the enjoyment of the franchise. "The governor, you know, Captain West," he had taken occasion to say one day during the canvass, "is an out-and-outer of the old school, and of course the ladies take on in the same line—women never have any opinions of their own, and it isn't any use talking politics in that house, so I keep my opinions to myself, but I'm quite of your way of thinking, sir. You see, Captain, I don't take things for granted; the study of anatomy and materia medica and that sort of thing makes a man go to the bottom of things. I am Liberal to the backbone, sir."

Thus passed the winter days at Leatherby, Sybil spending by agreement every alternate week with us, and going during her visits three times a-week to her aunt's for her French lessons with Miss Jones. Those with little Mr Aborn the writing-master were suspended for the time, and I fear Sybil's mathematical education thereby stopped short somewhere about compound addition. During the alternate week, when it was Sybil's turn to stay with her aunts, Eva generally managed to secure her company and that of Mary Drew almost every evening that we were at home, and sometimes Miss Barton herself and even Miss Honoria would be prevailed upon to join the party, on all which occasions the chariot would be put in requisition to convey the fair freight to and

fro. Sunday we always spent in Church Street, partaking of Miss Barton's early dinner after the morning service.

At last, when we had completed the round of entertainments provided in our honour, and Christmas was coming on, when Mr Paterson and Mr and Mrs Herries had promised to pay us a visit, I suggested to Eva that as our stay would be short, it behoved us to lose no time in returning these hospitalities, and in fact giving a series of dinner-parties ourselves. "It will give us an opportunity for spending a little money in the town, which we have hardly done sufficiently yet. It struck me Mr Hambrowe looked at me in the street rather sulkily yesterday, as if he thought the consumption of champagne in this house was quite unbefitting a borough member. I will sit down and order some of his highest brand straightway, and some port and claret from Tawney's; and do you, my pretty one, make out a list of invitations.

"How will this do, Charlie?" said Eva, half an hour later. "I have put down sixteen; that will be enough, I suppose, for the first time."

"Let us see. The Rupert Bowles, Mr R. Podger Bowles, the William Bowles; isn't that making a family business of it? better get the William Bowles to come another time. The Fergussons—that won't do, dear. Rupert Bowles is about the only man in the place on our list who took Fergusson's opposition to my canvass seriously. Better not bring them together."

"Oh dear me, I forgot all about that; but it does seem such nonsense to bring politics into dinner-parties. Besides I am sure Mr Fergusson does not think about such things."

"Very likely not, my love, but Rupert Bowles does. Better ask the Fergussons for another day, you will have plenty of opportunities. Well, let us see who else are down. The Bamfyldes, three; the St Legers—good, they will be flattered at meeting county people; Miss Barbour; why, you have left out Mr Sheepshanks! he may very possibly come just this once to dine with his fellow-member, at any rate we ought to ask him. Then you must not forget that Mr Paterson and his ward will be here; and of course Sybil will be here that evening, and then there are ourselves. And why, goodness me, you have left out the Scraps! That will never do."

"Must we ask Mrs Scrap, Charlie?" said Eva, hesitatingly.

"If we don't want to convert her into an enemy for life, we must."

"It will quite spoil the evening if she comes. I never feel quite comfortable when she is in the room. She's so——"

"You mean that she is a little disposed to be patronising, and more than disposed to be vulgar. You can't help the vulgarity, and the patronising will adjust itself by-and-by; but Scrap was my most energetic supporter, and Mrs Scrap did her best too."

"But you must please tell me what to order for dinner, Charlie; I haven't a notion what is proper."

"Better just have what everybody else has. Side dishes and sweets, and so forth."

"Yes, but I don't know the names of a single one. I never shall understand anything about cookery."

"Well then, ask your aunt to come up and help you to make out a bill of fare."

"Oh, my dear Charlie! Aunt Emily has no more notion about it than I have. She would be sure to suggest minced veal. We used always to have minced veal for dinner whenever Mr Drew took his luncheon with us. We can't have minced veal for sixteen people, you know."

"Well, not exactly; but suppose we take Johnson and the cook into council. The Miss Haringtons used to give very fair dinners, I believe,—very likely their servants will understand all about it without any help."

The butler and cook proved quite equal to the occasion, and both in their quiet way seemed to relish the excitement of professional employment, so the difficulty was overcome; and as Eva declared she could not write her invitations, because my presence flurried her, I went to my room to write my own letters. Returning to the morning room half-an-hour afterwards, my little wife was still hard at work on her notes.

"Not done yet, Eva? and what is that little book

you have got there?" for with some confusion she had closed a little volume that was on the table, and had covered it with a piece of blotting-paper.

"Nothing that you need see, sir," said she, blushing and trying to convey it to her pocket. "Now, Charlie, don't be so rude; let me alone; for shame, you rude boy," cried Eva, as, after a delightful little struggle, I remained captor of the book.

I had noticed this little book several times before as being constantly in her possession, and fancied it was one of those little devotional manuals which young ladies are sometimes wont to carry out with them. It turned out to be a pocket edition of Johnson's Dictionary.

"Well," said Eva, with a pretty blush of confusion, as I smiled, looking perhaps a little sarcastic, "how can I help it? You scolded me the other day because I spelt apology with two p's. If I am never to make these mistakes I must hunt up my words sometimes. You are not angry, are you, Charlie?" she added, after a pause.

"Angry! you little thing; what should make you think I was angry?"

"Because you looked so awfully severe. You know I always was stupid, you know, and so I always shall be."

"My darling, pray don't talk like that! To hear you say such things is almost as bad as if I said them myself. Spelling after all, my child, is said to

be very much matter of opinion, and the slips even people who call themselves well educated make, not to mention Lord High Commissioners and swells of that sort, are surprising. But, my dear Eva, you can't always be sure of having Johnson in your pocket, and the way to spell is to read. If you don't accustom yourself to the look of words, you will never be able to spell. I have been wanting to say something about this for some time, Eva dear. You see, if you don't ever put anything into that pretty little head, you can't expect much to come out of it."

"But, my dear Charlie, when has there been time for reading? Just look at the life we have been leading! First in London, and then down here, and then in Germany, and then this election, and all the time I have been so tired I could often scarcely stand, much less read. I think you are rather hard upon me, Charlie."

"My dear, I don't say a word about that time. We were leading a life of bustle, and you were not strong, and there was plenty to be done besides reading. But we have now been settled down here nearly three months, and I really don't think you have opened a book all that time, or even so much as looked at the newspaper."

"Oh, Charlie! you know it is no good wanting me to take an interest about politics; I never could understand anything about them, and never shall.

And as for books, I am sure the whole day goes in something or other. The time seems to fly."

"I am glad you don't find it dull, my pretty one, for sometimes I think——"

"Charlie! as if anything could be dull with you. But sometimes I think too——"

"Well, what is it my little woman thinks? Come, Eva, unburden yourself. I see from all this hesitation that something weighs on that little brain."

"Well, Charlie—you won't be angry with me, will you?—don't you think," said Eva, nestling her head on my shoulder, "don't you think it would have been better if you had found out what a stupid little thing I was before you married me?"

"Oh, Eva, Eva! how can you talk in that shocking way? What can have put such horrid notions into your head? What have I said to make you in such a taking?" For the large tears were beginning to drop on my coat, although she was trying to conceal them.

"It isn't what you say, Charlie," she replied between her bursts of sobbing, "but you look so vexed very often when I say something silly—I know I am a little goose, but I can't help it. We can't be different from what we are, can we? No, Charlie; you should have thought of this before you married me."

"Good heavens! Eva, what can I have been looking like that you should be conjuring up all these horrid doubts? Will you believe me, dear, that all these fancies are wholly out of your own imagi-

nation? And whatever we do," I added, when she became a little calmer, "don't let us get into the way of talking about what we might have done. That is not a healthy kind of retrospect for man and wife to indulge in, depend on it. But this comes on me like a revelation, Eva. Here was I fancying that I was making you happy; and you all the time building up this fabric of imaginary troubles. It is all my fault, I have no doubt; I suppose I must have been behaving like a brute, for you to be so put out, but I did not mean to be."

"No, no, Charlie, don't say that; it's all my fault. But you do look so dreadfully grave sometimes, you quite frighten me, when I say something silly. I know I am very stupid and ignorant, but we can't make ourselves different to what we are."

"But, my dear Eva, after all, we need not always stand still in these things. Our education need not come to an end as soon as one grows up. And although you, dear, are a married woman, after all you are not nineteen yet, so there is plenty of time for learning and wisdom too, in addition to beauty."

"Oh no, Charlie, it's no good talking about these things. I suppose I must have a pretty face, because you are always saying so, but I shall never be clever and learned and that sort of thing. You must be satisfied to take me as you find me."

"My darling, I wish I knew how to cure you of this false impression! I won't be such a prig as to

say that I am more than satisfied to have you as you are, because that would be putting the matter on quite a wrong footing, and making matters worse. But what shall I say to put you at ease? When I feel that it is I who ought to apologise, when I wonder how a sweet young creature like you, who might have had all the world at your feet, came to choose such an ugly old fellow as me for a husband."

"Now, Charlie, you are laughing at me."

"There it is again! What can I have done to drive you into this state of self-abasement, Eva? What can I do to make you see things in their true light, to make you feel that you have no right to put me up on a pedestal above you in this way? Any one who knows us—Mr Paterson, or the Fergussons, or any one else—would say at once, if they spoke candidly, that it is I who am the lucky one, and have got the best of the bargain."

"Then they would say wrong. Mr Paterson is a dear old flatterer, I know, and the Fergussons are such old friends; but they can't help my being a stupid little thing."

Here our conversation was interrupted by the sound of the chariot-wheels announcing that Aunt Emily and Sybil were coming to spend the day. And it seemed soon as if the little cloud had passed away; but, alas! the first words of difference had been spoken, and they could not but leave a certain uneasiness of feeling behind. Both must have felt,

whatever we may have said, that there was something left unsatisfied, and a certain want of confidence remaining between us. And when, the following evening, which we were spending alone, and I was spelling out with the help of a dictionary Von Ordnung's great work on military organisation, I noticed that Eva took out from the bookcase a volume of 'Russell's Modern Europe,' which formed one of those included in the Miss Haringtons' neat selection of standard authors in brown leather bindings, and sat down by the fire to read it. But in a few minutes the pretty little head was nodding, and I don't think that estimable work was ever put in requisition again.

It was not often, however, that we were alone when at home, and I am bound to mention that our first dinner-party went off very successfully, except that Eva was rather taken aback by Mrs Scrap kissing her with effusion when she came into the drawing-room; also that Eva quite forgot to give the signal for rising from the dinner-table, so that the ladies sat on till past ten o'clock. But the most successful event in this way was the meeting of the Leatherby Philharmonic Society, which was held at our house on Christmas Eve under Mr Fergusson's presidency, with a full orchestra of seventeen performers, which gave classical music of the highest character for three consecutive hours. Mrs Herries was spending the

Christmas week with us, and Herries himself was persuaded to join her, arriving late in the evening and staying over till the following Monday, when he departed considerably before daylight to catch the early train to town. Mr Paterson came down too, accompanied by the young lady from the Royal Academy, who, poor girl, having no particular home of her own, was very glad to pay us a lengthened visit, and quite electrified the good folks of Leatherby at the concert by her powerful voice. Almost equal to professional, observed Mr St Leger, who played a second violin in the orchestra at the Handel festivals, and was considered nearly as great an authority as Mr Fergusson himself; as indeed it well might be. The supper which followed went off very well; and when I proposed the toast of 'Prosperity to the Leatherby Philharmonic Society,' and thanked the president and members on behalf of the rest of the company for the splendid musical treat they had afforded us, there was both excitement and emotion when Mr Fergusson, in responding, feelingly reviewed their past history, how through evil report and good report, undismayed by difficulty and embarrassment, the Society had maintained its course, till, from the humble beginning many of those present could remember, it had attained to its present magnificent development.

Emboldened by this social success, Eva proposed

giving a ball, and this I think was the only thing needed to bring up our popularity to the highest pitch; but there was a sort of understanding with the Miss Haringtons that we should not disturb their comfortable if old-fashioned furniture, so we abstained from the temptation.

CHAPTER XXI.

TO BUSINESS AT LAST.

BUT even the longest winter must come to an end. Parliament was summoned for the 8th of February, and a day or two before that we established ourselves in London. "Better take a furnished house for a season or two," said Mr Paterson, "till you see your way, and find out exactly what you want. A house that would suit you very well now, might be inconvenient by-and-by, if you become a great man; besides it is just as well to begin quietly. It is easy enough to expand in your scale of living, the difficulty always is in contracting it." Acting on this sound advice we had secured a small house in the direction of Queen's Gate. My first impulse would have been to settle down somewhere near to Westminster, but I recollected that Lord Palmerston had recommended a walk home as the best sedative after the excitement of debate, so in this view the distance appeared just the proper thing. The house, of which Eva expressed full approval when we went up to town together to

make a final selection, was of the regular London pattern, two rooms to a floor; a comfortable, but gloomy dining-room, with a still more gloomy apartment at the back, to be devoted henceforth to blue-books and business; two drawing-rooms on the first floor, to which the rest of the house had been sacrificed; then came a bedroom and dressing-room; over these a spare room destined for Sybil later in the season, with a little workroom for Annette at the back; while a narrow staircase led from this floor to the servants' rooms at the top, where you could touch the ceiling with your hand, and where they must inevitably be burnt to death on the outbreak of fire. The furniture was good and new, for the original tenant ('something in the city') had only been a short time in occupation. Nobody in the house seemed ever to have written a letter, the appliances for which were wholly wanting, or opened a book; but the addition of a writing-table or two and some book-shelves completed our arrangements in this respect, and when our books and other belongings were unpacked our new abode began to look sufficiently snug.

About this time the schedule was completed at last, the duties finally paid and declarations sworn, and the estate handed over to my own control. And looking over the account, I was really distressed to see how small were the charges made for transacting all my business, hardly enough it seemed, to pay for

the wine we had drunk at Mr Paterson's table. Discovering how little there was to discharge for all the trouble the firm had taken on my behalf, I felt more than ever ashamed at the horrid suspicions of earlier days, the very thought of which made my cheeks tingle, more especially when I recalled the unworthy expectations of later ones, that their disinterested exertions in the matter of the election and everything else would be accounted for in the bill. The bill paid, there was still a heavy load of obligation remaining of genuine hearty kindness, which it would be difficult ever to repay.

"And now," said my kind old friend, as we were talking over the business in his room in Gracechurch Street, "you see pretty clearly how matters stand. Arranging, as we have done, to distribute your election expenses over three years, and giving you a couple more to clear off the succession duties, you leave your capital untouched, and still have close upon two thousand five hundred a-year to start with. You won't find it a penny too much for a man in Parliament, especially if you are going to be liberal in your subscriptions and so forth, down at Leatherby; but, depend on it, you will find it every bit as easy to live on that sum as on twice the amount. Everything depends on the scale you start upon. We are all creatures of habit. So, if I may presume to offer advice on the matter, I would say, begin quietly.

There is no call to do much for the first year or two, and it will be easy enough to expand as occasion requires."

It was in furtherance of the sound advice of the same kind previously administered, with which my experience of English life so far acquired entirely agreed, for I had already discovered it was very easy to spend money, that the modest house by Queen's Gate had been selected, and our household was now organised on a scale to match. Frederic, Mr Paterson's servant, got us a man like himself, and a cook and under-maid were procured through Mrs Herries's agency, who, with Annette, completed the establishment. I bought a brougham and a light phaeton for Eva, for which, following universal custom, we jobbed the horses, together with a corpulent coachman, accustomed evidently to late hours and beer; we jobbed also a couple of saddle-horses, good for park riding.

"Now, Eva," I said, on the eventful morning when Parliament was to assemble, "I have kept the purse hitherto, and all the accounts, but I am going to be dreadfully busy henceforward, so you must take the housekeeping off my hands. See, here is a little stock-in-trade for the fair accountant," and so saying I produced a little volume bound in Russia, with gilt edges and a gilt lock and key, gilt lettered "Cash Book" on the back.

"I will try, Charlie, but I am afraid I shall make

an awful mess of it. I never could understand anything about accounts."

"I suppose you have never had much to do with them, so far, dear, but you will find it the easiest thing possible. You just put on this side all the money you receive, and on the other all you spend, and the difference will be your balance in hand."

"I'll try, Charlie; but I never could do addition of money, and I am sure I shall never be able to add up those long pages properly."

"A little practice will make it quite easy, my child. It's a mere question of practice. Look at that dashing young lady in the counting-house at the Belgravia. I don't suppose she was particularly clever, but she could add you up a bill, or turn napoleons into sovereigns at the exchange of the day, like lightning. You have only to try, and with a little practice you will be astonished at your own powers in the arithmetical line."

"Oh, it's all very well to flatter, Charlie, but you don't know how stupid I am. I am sure I shall never be able to manage it." And Eva, as she said this, leaned over the table on which the book was lying, and looked quite downcast, and almost ready to cry.

"You know, Eva," I said, after a pause, "I don't want to bother you, but a moderate degree of care in money matters makes money go much further, and will add to the comfort of both of us. You can't

want to go through life without a little trouble of this sort. All I want you to do is to make a beginning."

"It isn't the trouble I mind," said Eva; "but I am afraid of making blunders, and then you will be angry with me."

"Angry with you, my dear Eva! When have I ever been angry with you? How can you say such things?"

"No, not angry exactly; but you will look so grave if I don't manage that dreadful book properly, and then I shall get frightened, and then I shall be more stupid than ever."

"It is I who am stupid, to look so solemn without meaning anything by it. But I don't want to make these accounts very tremendous at first. I will tell you how we will arrange matters. I must keep an account of some sort with the Leatherby bank, or old St Leger will be in a huff, and Mrs Gernell will never forgive us. I will make over their cheque-book to you. You shall draw cheques upon them for all your expenditure, and then at the end of the month I will make good what you have drawn from them from my London account, so as to keep a fixed balance with them. You shall be, in fact, a fixed imprest holder, as the accountants call it."

"I dont understand what that means," said Eva; "but I think I should be able to manage the cheques much better than keeping that dreadful book."

This arrangement was accordingly determined on, and I set off to take my seat in the House. But somehow this day, to which I had been looking forward so impatiently, yet brought with it a certain sense of disappointment. Already there was a tinge of alloy in the anticipated happiness, a bitter flavour left from the morning's talk. Could I be doing my duty by my little wife if she was thus so soon getting to be afraid of my looks and words? How if a feeling of this sort had so soon arisen, when we had thus far been like lovers leading a honeymoon life, how would it be kept down amid the distractions and preoccupations of the profession I had now embarked upon? Some such uneasy reflections came unbidden into my mind as I walked down towards Westminster, but I was too much engrossed by the coming ceremony to pursue the reflection. We are fond of saying that we are the creatures of circumstance; but is it not oftener true that we allow circumstances to master us, instead of shaping them to suit our purpose? We see more or less dimly in the course of life whither we are tending, and might, if we chose, keep clear of the rocks looming ahead; but vanity, pride, oftener still indolence and a sort of mental flabbiness, from which hardly any are free, act more powerfully than the whispered murmurings of conscience, and thus too often we are content to drift on till it is too late to avert the disaster.

Sergeant Lowder was waiting for me by appoint-

ment in Westminster Hall, having just come off a case in the Common Pleas, and under his shelter I made my first entry through the side-door sacred to members. It was worth being in Parliament, I observed, if only that you can hear the debates when you like, without being subjected to the indignities undergone by visitors to the galleries. Why should the servants of the people's representatives surpass in insolence all other creatures of the beadle and verger class? And I thought if ever I became better acquainted with the Speaker, I would take the liberty of putting that question to him.

In the library we found Mr Sheepshanks, who had come up on one of his rare visits to town, and who, with the Sergeant, introduced me to the House. There were five or six members to be sworn in, and after that process, there being no room this day behind the Treasury bench, I took up my position on a back seat below the gangway on the same side, and set out from there to watch the men and manners of the place. On this first day there was little doing, although the House was very full. There was the usual address, but the speeches on it from the Opposition were brief and uninteresting; and we all got away in time for dinner. Eva and I partook of that meal at the Lowders, who had found us out immediately on our coming to town. There was a rather large party, and as the Sergeant took Eva down I overheard him say, "So, Mrs West, your

husband has made his *début* in the House at last." "Yes," said Eva; "I am so glad. I wish I had been there. But did he make a nice speech?" After this I did not feel very keen about discussing my first day in Parliament with her after we returned home, but as it happened, Eva did not put any questions.

The popular notion about young and aspiring members is, that they enter the House ardent with zeal, burning to distinguish themselves, and sitting steadily through the debates in the hope of some chance opportunity of coming forward; or else that they work up for some great occasion when they may break out with a great oration; but that these zealots grow cool gradually on making the surprising discovery that a mere indefinite aspiration after greatness is not a specific recipe for obtaining it, and eventually settle down into humdrum members of the ordinary kind, vastly different to the creations of their early fancies. However that may be, the process of disillusion ought certainly not to take long; and, as already remarked, I had seen sufficient, even during my few visits to the gallery of the House, to admit of forming a pretty clear conception of what the reality of membership would be, the dreary waste of time, the indescribable tedium of about three-fourths of the business that went on. Nor did it take long to discover that an ordinary member need be very little there; and in fact I used at first to

attend only sufficiently often to vote when required for any important division, and to learn the ways of the House, which, after all, so far at least as regarded their effect on other people, were very soon mastered. The thing which had most interest for me was the comparative success of different members; to analyse the reasons why some men, not particularly able or striking in their delivery, nevertheless always were listened to with attention, while others, although maybe voluble enough, were uniformly snubbed and suppressed. But the ways and manners of the House generally were an interesting study. The most noticeable thing, perhaps, was the sort of deprecating manner which members generally assumed, especially when walking through Westminster Hall or in the lobbies, between four and five o'clock, at which time the latter place usually contained a sprinkling of constituents seeking admission, or admiring the spectacle in the abstract. I do not say but that some members, who saw the obsequious policeman jostling visitors aside to make way for them, may have felt inward pride at a sense of their importance. There may perhaps have been such, possibly borough members for Liberal constituencies, but the general aspect of members was one of a deprecating character, as much as to say, Here we are, gentlemen, most unworthy misrepresentatives of you who are looking on. We feel that the difference in our positions is a most invidious one, and really if things were as they

ought to be, you would be in our places and we in yours; but, in the mean time, pray excuse us, we are very humble. The attitude of the Ministerial members towards the rest of the House was even more apologetic, as if to say, It is really quite absurd that we should be in office and you gentlemen not; but pray, don't suppose we take any credit to ourselves for it—a mere accident, a foolish trick of speaking has done it, or something insignificant of that sort; pray excuse us, we are really very humble. This, however, was a mere lobby and library manner, so to speak. Inside the House the Treasury Bench could be fierce enough; persuasive indeed, and mildly reproachful towards their erring friends below the gangway, who were disposed to be always kicking over the Treasury traces, and, in fact, gave a great deal more trouble than the Opposition, but rolling out sarcasm and defiance against honourable gentlemen on the other side of the House.

Another thing that struck me at first very keenly was the want of reality about the party struggling that went on, or, to be more accurate, the artificial nature of the contest, for the strife was sometimes real enough in one sense. I could have understood that youngsters at a debating club might grow hot over argument, profoundly impressed with the truth and importance of their own views of things; that men just on the threshold of public life should believe there was only one side to any question, and

be unable to understand how anybody could think differently from themselves; how in such cases passion might be made to do duty for logic, and anger take the place of articulate utterance: but I confess to a feeling of surprise when I came to look on and see who the men were that carried on this Parliamentary warfare; that the leaders on both sides were quite old men, whose own political careers gave evidence in how many different ways the same opinions could be regarded by similar minds, not to say the same minds; men in the decline of life, who in all other affairs had probably grown tolerant and dispassionate, free from the passions and prejudices which pervert the judgment of younger people; men, in short, whom one would be disposed to regard as raised above the level of ordinary strife, and who might survey in undisturbed serenity the strife of less experienced and more hot-blooded mortals. Of course I knew that it actually was not so; but then Merrifield and Braham and the rest had hitherto been mere abstractions, and it was not until I had taken my seat and noticed the sea of bald heads whenever members were uncovered, that I realised the incongruity of the proceedings. Indeed, the older the men, the more fierce the language very often. The bitterest sarcasms upon the Government used to come from a man well on the wrong side of sixty, and the most violent and recriminative rejoinders from an equally venerable opponent. In

fact, in politics men seemed always to remain young; and the seniors, who, it might be supposed, would have preferred sitting calmly to survey our conflicts from afar, like the blameless Ethiopians of Homer, were the very Ajax and Hector of the strife. This struck me the more coming from India, where old men—that is, old Englishmen—of any sort were rare, being either civilians passed over in promotion, and therefore withdrawn from the race of official competition, or generals and governors, personages to be treated with deference and respect.

The want of reality about Parliamentary warfare struck me the more visibly, because when I entered the House parties in their original sense had ceased to exist. In former days the two great divisions represented two specific sets of altogether diverse political opinions, and a man found no difficulty in deciding to which of the two he would belong. But now there was no longer any positive difference in principle between them. The one side had given up its original *rôle* of resisting all change, the other its advocacy of constant change. Both parties now admitted that reform of any part of our institutions was advisable, if only a sufficient case could be made out for it; opinion merely differed as to what constituted a valid case. Further, so many of the leaders had changed both their opinions and their sides at different times, even the two parties having once themselves changed places—the whilome constitu-

tionalists on one memorable occasion setting the example of taking a header over a constitutional Niagara while their opponents in vain tried to swim against the torrent—that in fact all broad lines of demarcation had become blurred and almost obliterated. The opinions of the two parties were now for the most part shaped by the views of their leaders for the *time being*; and as it was usually quite an open question what view each of these two distinguished men would take upon any point that arose, party politics were reduced to a perfectly incoherent condition. All that could be predicted was, that whichever side got the start in any proposal, the other would probably oppose it; one party was just as likely as the other to assume at any moment the office of drag to the political coach. But it was plain that there needed only the rise of some great question of principle in order that the House should recast itself anew; the existing party distinctions covered no longer any real differences of opinion; while the majority of the members were so essentially agreed on main principles as to present the elements for a combined party with a commanding majority, so soon as the ties of personal predilections and dislikes which still retained men in nominal bondage should be shaken off. I give these first impressions now because, although they may be by no means original, other persons having no doubt received them in their turn just in the same way, it appeared to me

that first impressions were the most accurate; for that after a certain time men in the House got to settle down into a conventional way of looking at all political matters, till at last the formalities of party government became in their eyes something inherent in the natural condition of things.

Another phenomenon which surprised me a good deal at first was the number of members who seemed to have no business in Parliament. I don't mean the young swells who entered for the fun of the thing, or as something to be done as a matter of course, just like coming of age, and who seldom showed except at four o'clock when questions were asked, or perhaps looked in for half an hour with their white ties and button-hole geraniums after dinner; nor the older county members, who, if they seldom spoke, added weight to the House, and formed a very imposing audience; nor the lawyers, whose main attention was given to their professional practice, and who looked at politics merely as a means to an end. There were a lot of men who seemed to fulfil no useful functions either in or out of the House; who knew nobody, not even each other; who seldom spoke at all and never to the point; middle-aged men for the most part with a very questionable command of the letter *h*, who sat about in obscure parts of the House, and apparently derived from that proceeding their only gratification.

It would be a trite thing to remark that if there

were not many good speakers, the House collectively made a very formidable audience, but the impression was so striking at first that it is worth recording. One felt that whatever might be the mental calibre of each particular individual, there was sure to be some one in the assembly who would detect a fallacy, some one against whose taste any fault of manner or impropriety of thought would offend. But what struck me still more forcibly, more even than the ease and readiness of the best speakers, was the tolerance of the House for bores. Certain men, indeed, for flippancy without wit, or something or other offensive in their manner, were put down without mercy; but for wearisome talking if otherwise inoffensive there appeared an infinite sufferance, although it must be added the House would often be made up of bores only, waiting for their own innings, and exercising patience on the give-and-take principle. What conceivable object these gentlemen proposed to themselves it would be difficult to understand. They had never anything original to say, nor anything original in the manner of saying it; they did not advance the cause of humanity or legislation by speaking, nor even their own, for their utterances seldom got more than a line or two of space in the newspapers, and were very often left out altogether, and what they said, or thought, or did, had not the smallest apparent influence on anybody or anything; yet night after night would these gentlemen be in

their places, springing up in coveys whenever the platform was vacant to catch the Speaker's eye, time after time, till at last by the process of elimination every one of the party had had his say, and the debate could be closed. Night after night this used to go on, and the same well-known names to appear in next morning's paper with a brief abstract tagged on to each. But different orders of beings find happiness in different ways; the jackdaw, perhaps, takes quite as much pleasure in its croaking as the nightingale in its song.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FIRST PLUNGE.

HOWEVER, I give these impressions because they only lasted for a time. After a very few days the strangeness of the life passed off; men no longer noticed the new member in the library or other haunts of the House; and I came and went like the rest. And then arose impatience to enter on the real business which brought me there. The point was how to set about it, for I was too keenly alive to the faults of others not to be anxious to avoid becoming a bore myself. There was of course the regular recipe of a big first speech, for a new member is always listened to; but then a big speech might prove flat, and it would be awkward to start again with the incubus of a first failure. A better course appeared to be to warm gradually into work, beginning by casual remarks in committee, and so proceeding onwards to higher flights with practice, as the first shyness wore off, taking care, above all, never to say anything unless there were something to say. But my first

attempt was not a very happy one. The Paymaster-General to the Forces, who had just been caught, and was quite new to military business, having stated that the artillery was divided into horse and foot artillery, I rose to explain that there were three kinds of artillery recognised in Her Majesty's service—namely, horse, field, and garrison artillery; whereupon that official replied that this was just what he meant—there was the artillery with horses for duty in the field, and there was the artillery for garrison duty, which he had for convenience' sake styled the foot-artillery; but he was obliged to the honourable and gallant member for setting him right as to the more exact terminology, whereon there was a slight titter. And next Saturday the *Overseer*, a weekly paper much given to epigram and omniscience, devoted one of the smart little paragraphs that made up its first two or three pages, to this incident. "The colonels are being reinforced by the captains. The last recruit to this obstructive brigade is a Captain West of the artillery, who succeeded Lord Stowe at Leatherby (borough with of course a purely agricultural constituency), a young officer evidently endowed with a fine capacity for small regimental details, as evidenced by his flippant comment on the Paymaster-General's statement last Friday se'nnight. When will these military gentry understand that the country does not care a fig whether a thing is called a battery or a brigade, but wants men with a definite

policy on military organisation; above all, wants brains? Cannot they understand, too, that it is because we cannot find knowledge conjoined with ideas that the country prefers a civilian administration of the army—prefers even the vague generalities of the Paymaster-General to the small exactness of military men, who seem unable to look beyond their own parade-ground?" This was a bad beginning; and matters did not improve when, a day or two later, on Mr Thorowcome observing that the inspector-general of recruiting considered it a very healthy sign that the artillery were only about 1500 below their proper strength, the demon of impatience possessed me to get up and say that as a matter of fact the regiment was just 1850 short of the required recruits, and that this fact appeared in my poor judgment to indicate a very unsatisfactory state of things. Whereupon Mr Thorowcome blandly retorted that no doubt the honourable and gallant member (from whose valuable aid in these discussions he hoped the House would derive much future benefit) thought with others of his cloth that there was nothing like leather. Well, the honourable and gallant member's statement about the strength of the artillery might very possibly be correct, although he had no reason to doubt that the return which he held in his hand was quite exact as to the facts; but the real thing to look to was the general condition of recruiting in the British army generally, and he was able to announce that whereas

six years before, when the right honourable gentleman on the opposite bench had charge of the department [this was a hit at old Perkyman], the establishment was 5.27 per cent short of its proper strength, it was now only 4.63 per cent short, and for his part he (Mr Thorowcome) considered that this was a far from unsatisfactory result to have brought about in six years. Further, he would take the opportunity of reminding the House that whereas at the period in question the army fourth-class reserve numbered only 835 men, it now amounted to 978 men.

This was a bad beginning. At the Union Jack, indeed, my *début* was rather favourably regarded. The *Overseer* was not much read at that institution, and my attacks, as my friends there were pleased to call them, both on the Paymaster-General and the War Minister were considered to be very much to the point. "You're quite right, West, my boy," said Cobbe Smith; "the state of the regiment is perfectly disgraceful. Would you believe it? in my battery we are eleven men and a trumpeter short of our proper complement; and as for horses, why, if we were to go on a campaign to-morrow, we should have to leave a couple of guns behind. I declare to you I have been in the regiment more than twenty years, and I never saw anything like it." And Cobbe Smith was so oppressed with a sense of his inability to proceed on a campaign the next morning with all the guns of his battery, that he sat back on the ottoman

in moody silence, with his hands thrust into his trousers-pockets.

"Then look at the promotion," broke in Straight. "Just look at me, six-and-twenty years in the service, and no more chance of getting the command of a horse brigade than West here."

"But what can you expect with a parcel of civilians to manage things? Why, if you were to show old Thorowcome a gun, I'll bet he wouldn't know the breech from the muzzle."

"Well, I hope West will show them up properly, with their blunders and ignorance," added Straight; "I know I would if I were in Parliament, but I shall never have that luck."

Notwithstanding the moral support afforded by the approbation of Cobbe Smith and Straight, I felt that it would never do to remain in this false position, and determined to make a vigorous effort for escape. The opportunity arrived almost sooner than expected, for on old Nixon's motion that the strength of the army should be reduced by ten thousand men, there was at one point of the debate a sort of slackness in the rising of members to occupy the vacancy: in a sudden access of audacity I got up, and heard my name called by the Speaker. There was no help for it now, and accordingly I made my plunge. I had made the discovery on the previous occasions when offering my unfortunate remarks, that it is not necessary for being heard to

shout at the top of your voice, and so fortunately managed to get off at once in the right sort of pitch, without bawling, or speaking so low as to be indistinct. I had my speech ready, a disquisition on general military principles, which it was easy by the interpolation of a few sentences to adapt to the point at issue—a practice, I afterwards found, which was not uncommon among honourable members, so that you give your speech all the appearance of an impromptu utterance. Yet this indeed it virtually was on the present occasion; for although I could have repeated my speech by heart, as thought over in many a walk between Westminster and Queen's Gate, somehow when once I warmed into the subject, new ways of putting my ideas rose in my mind, and I found myself going off the track I had laid out. This sort of inspiration which possesses some people when acting under the influence of an audience is quite inexplicable and incapable of being analysed, but it is, I suppose, what all men experience who have the gift of ready speaking. To have recited an impromptu speech in a room by myself would have been utterly impossible. I could not have got out half-a-dozen consecutive sentences without writing them down or stopping to think. But once on my legs in the House, and charged with specific ideas, there appeared no sort of difficulty in expressing them. The difficulty was indeed to know when to stop; and although I seemed to be on my

legs for only about ten minutes, I found by the clock that the speech had lasted for more than forty.

There could be no doubt of the success of this first effort, even if some of the morning papers had not devoted a special article to it next morning. When the House becomes so silent that nothing is to be heard but your own voice; when members cease to go out, and the place gradually gets fuller as the speech goes on; and when, without being able to recognise any one in particular, you become sensible of a sea of faces all turned towards you, it does not need the "hear, hear," which breaks in at intervals and follows at the end, to tell you that the effort has been effective. The Treasury Bench did not cheer, perhaps because members did not wish to commit themselves to specific approval of some of my ideas; but there was no opposition on either side, for I had endeavoured to place the matter above a party footing, and several acquaintances from both sides offered their congratulations afterwards. My object was partly, of course, to let people know that there was one soldier at any rate who did not think that there was nothing like leather; and when I said that the honourable proposer of the amendment appeared to have a good deal of reason on his side when he urged that the army should be reduced by ten thousand men, for that the existing establishment had been arrived at upon no definite principle, and was neither one thing nor the other—too large for peace, too

small for war—the gentlemen below the gangway gave plenty of applause, which, however, died away when I went on to say that there was no reason why the particular strength he proposed should be more suitable in the nature of things than that proposed by the Government; and that, as the burden of proof lay with those who wanted change, it would be proper to support the establishment fixed by the Government till some other specific distribution should be shown to be more suitable; then the approbation ceased in this part of the House, but was taken up on the other side. But the point of what I advanced was in the development of the argument that this mode of dealing with the army was as politically unscientific and unsafe as it was opposed to all sound economy. The time has surely arrived, I submitted, for recognising the fact that a standing army is no longer dangerous to the liberties of the country. At any rate, if danger were to arise from that quarter, it would not be from the power given to the Crown or the Government, but from an entirely different and opposite condition of things. It was surely time to recognise the fact that the old military polity of nations arming for war had passed away, and become replaced by a new state of society, under which all Europe stood ready armed. The gradual change from a peace to a war footing, which occurred in former times, was no longer met with. The change was instantaneous; and therefore for England alone to rely

on the old system, keeping up a force in peace time which was neither one thing nor the other, trusting to meeting the difficulty somehow or another, was as complete an anachronism, to say nothing of the waste and extravagance involved, as if resort were had to the practice of the middle ages, when the king called on the barons to summon their men-at-arms, and to come and invade France. It is not the case that the military liabilities of the country vary from year to year. The only variation that takes place is in the feelings of the nation, alternating between false assurance and unreasoning fear, or according to the greater or smaller attention given to Continental politics, as evidenced by the whimsical additions to and reductions of the army; but the liability remains in fact a constant quantity, being properly measured, not by our false fears or false confidence, but by the military power of other nations, which, if it alters at all, alters only to increase. What we had to do, then, was first to obtain a clear view of our liabilities, which surely it might be possible to arrive at, and then to frame our military organisation accordingly. Our insular position would, no doubt, admit of our doing this on a smaller and cheaper scale than was practicable for other nations; but if our dangers were less, our responsibilities were not; and until the national voice distinctly repudiated that responsibility, and pronounced that England's future policy should be limited to the defence of our

own shores from invasion, this playing fast and loose with the army was a childish policy, equally unworthy of a great nation, or a government responsible for the exercise of foresight. Not the least fault of such a policy was its wastefulness, for war as for peace. For war, because if one fact was plainly demonstrated by recent history, it was that war could only be waged cheaply if waged quickly; but it was plain to any one who thought about it, that our present system would oblige us, in case of war, to drift into a repetition of the fatuous mode of pursuing it which we followed at the beginning of the century, when Ministers came down to the House to propose a vote of forty thousand men as a sort of number which would furnish a good lot of fighting, and keep a few stray expeditions agoing till the next meeting of Parliament; and when people *looked on* a war as a sort of chronic outlet for the constitution, like a seton in a scrofulous patient, which might be kept going for an indefinite time, or at any rate till the Government went out—money and blood enough being frittered away in the long-run to have settled the matter in a single campaign if properly expended. The system was equally wasteful in peace, because economy in the establishments and more costly portions of the army was impossible, so long as the total strength of the forces was liable to these whimsical fluctuations. It did not then in the least follow that the adoption of a more definite military policy would

lead to greater cost. On the contrary, the presumption was wholly the other way. Who could practise economy in his own household if he never kept up the same number of servants for a week together? Just so with regard to the army. Fixity of system should be the direct precursor of economy, because until you know distinctly what you want, you will never find out what you don't want. Put your establishment on a permanent basis, and you will be able to lop off the excrescences, of which be sure there are plenty. You would most probably find, for one thing, that the number of men on actual service might be sensibly reduced. There is no more reason why the strength of the army and its cost should be liable to fluctuation than that of any other branch of the public service. Put an end, then, to this fatuous policy of annual votes and fluctuating estimates. Let the military establishment of the country be fixed permanently by Act of Parliament, in pursuance of a definite policy, to be deliberately considered; and when so fixed, let it be maintained intact till a new state of things arises, or until a distinctly new policy is recognised and adopted by the nation.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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TRUE REFORMER

A

TRUE REFORMER

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE

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A TRUE REFORMER.

CHAPTER XX.

COMING TO THE SURFACE.

It was sufficient proof of the impression made by this speech, that not only did Mr Braham, later in the evening, refer to it in complimentary terms, congratulating the House, as he put it, on the accession to their discussions of the honourable and gallant and ingenuous young member; but Mr Merrifield himself replied to it at some length, and was indeed somewhat vehement and very discursive. War was a detestable thing, and it was to be hoped the nations of the world would come to see its iniquity in course of time. Meanwhile our insular position gave us an immunity from the dangers of war which other nations did not possess, and therefore the analogy from the condition of Continental powers did not apply to ourselves. At the same time, it might be freely admitted that no Government would deserve

the confidence of the House or the country which was not prepared to maintain the national honour, and to carry out any engagements which the sense of the country should declare ought to be fulfilled, but which it would be quite time to provide for when each particular case arose. Finally, he hoped the House would accept these assurances, and not be led away by specious appeals to the imagination, or temptations to indulge in the luxury of passion. All which, pronounced in a splendid, clear, ringing voice, with a good deal of emphasis, a copious flow of words, and an abundance of illustration and amplification, sounded highly impressive; but yet it was not quite plain what it all meant—whether the great speaker intended to imply that we ought to be satisfied with trusting in Providence, or that we could afford to be independent of that aid. In fact it was the inconclusiveness of the speech which brought up Mr Braham, who was quite in his best style of sarcasm and repartee while pointing out what he termed the political effeminacy and flabbiness of his right honourable opponent, although at the same time leaving it quite an open question which way his own opinions tended.

These two speeches would have been sufficient evidence of success, even if various members had not come up afterwards to offer congratulations, while two or three of the daily papers next morning had articles on the debate, with complimentary notices of

my share in it. The *Overseer*, too, came out on the following Saturday with a patronising little paragraph: "We have done Captain West an injustice. He is no mere swash-buckler after all. His speech on Thursday was marked by a catholicity of view as wide as it was unusual. The colonels having failed us, what if the captains can help us? It seems just possible that this young member may turn out to be the man the country is in want of—a man, that is, with brains and a policy, and with technical knowledge enough to keep him clear of the small blunders civilian army reformers are apt to commit, and which the colonels, with their proficiency in trumpery details, are always on the watch to detect."

Congratulations also came in from other quarters. At the next board meeting of the Agricultural and Commercial Assurance Company, our chairman, who was in the wholesale oil trade and always carried a moral supply of that commodity about with him for general application, took occasion to make quite a little speech about the honour which he was sure the board must all feel had been conferred on their body by the distinguished appearance lately made by one—by the latest, but not the least, accession to their number, in another place. And in the bank parlour of the Metropolitan and Provincial I was conscious of taking up quite a new position, feeling indeed that it would have been quite possible without appearing presumptuous to question the im-

primatur of our secretary upon the character of the discounts effected by him during the week. Such is the magic power, the overvalued power, of being able to speak without stammering.

Perhaps, however, the most flattering testimony to the effect of my maiden effort was the sort of little flutter of which I became sensible when, a day or two afterwards, I entered the reading-room of the Union Jack, as those who knew my name whispered it to those who did not, and men looked up from their newspapers as I passed to my seat. Here, in truth, was fame—on a very small scale; for the Union Jack, although taking high ground for a purely service club on the score of fashion and exclusiveness, was not equally conspicuous in an intellectual or political sense.

Yet it was not all praise, for some of my old friends appeared scarcely to approve of my proceeding; Peake of the Engineers, for example, whom I met on the club steps as I was coming away. "Holloa, West!" said he, "how d'ye do?" and then, after a pause, during which he looked at me with a sort of protesting smile, he added, "so you have been making a regular speech?" much in the same way as one might say, "so you have got a new hat?" implying that it was open to him or anybody else who chose to do the same, albeit it would show questionable taste to do it. He said no more, and after a further smiling pause, passed in; but I could without diffi-

culty interpret his brief address to imply that he considered I had done a distinct injury to himself, a man nearly ten years my senior in the army, by thus going out of the professional groove in which he was accustomed to move. Peake's view was taken by divers others of my acquaintance, who were evidently put out that one of their number should do anything different from what they had ever done themselves; but for the most part these critics conveyed their reproof by withholding all allusion to the subject, discussing the weather, or the Derby, or anything but what they knew would be interesting to the person they addressed. Straight's criticism was also somewhat qualified. "I see you have gone into the speaking line already," said he. "That's not much in my way," he added, and he might with great truth have added that he was not accustomed to edit Greek plays or to write leading articles for a morning paper.

My gallant friend Pyghed, commanding the 110th, was considerably more hearty. "I congratulate you," said he, shaking hands in the street; "that's right, my boy, pitch into *them*, give it them well. I should like to see you in old Merrifield's place, that I should. Anyhow, give it them all round. A parcel of ignorant beggars; much they know about the army. Done enough mischief already, they have." Who they were whom my gallant friend thus apostrophised he did not explain, but he evi-

dently regarded the interference of Parliament in army affairs at all as a thing only just tolerable and to be endured.

There was one disappointment in store. I did not get away on the night of the speech until very late, or rather early; and notwithstanding Lord Palmerston's prescription of a walk home, it needed the anodyne of one or more cigars and the best part of a stupid novel to subdue the excitement of debate, and in fact I sat up reading by the fire till Eva came home from a ball, her first ball without me, and to which she had gone with the Stricklands. Conversation turned on this for some time, till suddenly Eva bethought her that I had come home very late too, whereon I mentioned that there had been a long debate, distinguished by my first speech.

"Oh, fancy," said Eva; "that is nice. How I wish I had been there, instead of at this stupid ball which has made me so dreadfully tired! But where is the account of it? I must read it before I go to bed."

I explained that the debates of the night would not appear till in the morning's paper, which after all was usually held to be pretty quick work.

"Of course," said Eva; "how stupid I am to forget that! but really I am too tired to think. However, we shall see it in the morning."

And next morning the speech was reported with

very fair accuracy, and I confess to reading it through myself before Eva came down; and although she was very late, and I wanted to be off to keep an engagement, I waited on in order to hear what she thought about it. But although I put the paper on the table close by her plate, she had forgotten all about it, and I felt too proud and too much hurt to remind her. I did not see Eva again till the evening, when we had a dinner-party, and Mrs Strickland, who was among the guests, began to congratulate me with effusion on my success. Such a congratulation was a success in itself, for Mrs Strickland, who was the wife of our county member, the gentleman whose defection to the Liberal party had caused such a sensation in Yewcestershire, was a great politician as well as a leader of fashion, having all the zeal of a convert. We had made the acquaintance of the family during our winter at Leatherby, Stampton Court being only about seven miles from that town, when both Mrs Strickland and the young ladies straightway fell in love with Eva, and a week spent at Stampton had been among the pleasant episodes of the winter, Mr Strickland's fox-hounds hunting the country adjacent to that covered by the Leatherby subscription pack. Mrs Strickland, while enunciating boldly at second-hand her husband's Liberal principles, was evidently uneasy at the county schism his change of politics had occasioned; but what appeared to me to weigh most upon her mind during

the time of our visit, was the rumour, or rather the general belief throughout North Yewcestershire regions, that her husband should be coquetting with Mr Merrifield about a peerage. Mr Strickland, forsooth Mr Strickland the great commoner, whose ancestors had represented the county ever since the times of the Tudors—whose grandfather had been offered an earldom by Pitt, and whose father might have got a peerage any day on hinting that he wanted it; Mr Strickland of Stampton Court, to be asking Mr Merrifield, and asking as a favour for a miserable barony! Well might this malignant libel, although plainly a mere factious device of the enemy, weigh on the spirits of a lady who, although polite and suave to gushing, had nevertheless a fair share of latent pride. Another care there was which up to this time had not been hinted at, and this political grievance was lost sight of in the London world, where Mrs Strickland was simply a lady of fashion with a desire to cover her husband's flank movement by a show of intellectual liberalism; and in this view to convert their family mansion in Mulgrave Square into a sort of modern Holland House; and I think the lady was really pleased at the success of the young member who had been taken into their circle on trust. "I want to have a long talk with you about these army matters, Captain West, some day when you can find time. Your speech has set us all thinking about it. I don't altogether agree

with what you say, you know; for Mr Strickland is quite a Radical on these points, and is full of the Swiss system; and of course we women are apt to take opinions from those about us; and then Tom—Tom was Mrs Strickland's only son, and a captain in the Guards—is quite of the other way of thinking, and has great arguments with his father; but what you say about the development of nations is really so very striking, that altogether I think you have made a convert of me. That was the part of your speech which impressed me most. It seems so very true when put in that way; don't you think so, Mrs West? But how pleased you must have been this morning!"

All this was delicate flattery, while Eva looked so confused that I was glad to occupy Mrs Strickland's attention until she recovered herself.

After our guests had departed, Eva remained standing thoughtfully by the fire. At last she said, coming up and putting her hands on my shoulder in her usual coaxing way, "Oh Charley, I am so sorry."

A few playful words would have put all right. Instead of these, I answered, "What is there to be sorry about? Your party appeared to have gone off very well."

"Oh no, it is not that. You know what I mean quite well. I am so sorry about the speech."

"My dear," I replied, like a detestable young prig

as I was, "there is nothing to be sorry about; I can't help these things, I will try and do better another time."

"Oh, Charley, don't talk like that, please. That shows me how angry you are. And I am sure I deserve it. But you know I always was a stupid little thing, wasn't I? We can't make ourselves different from what we are, can we?"

"My dear, it is not for me to pay you compliments, but it is not a question of your abilities as it seems to me. It is rather my poor ability that has very properly come under your unconscious criticism."

"Ah! I see that you are still angry from the bitter way in which you speak. And I know I deserve it; but indeed I fully meant to read your speech and all about it, but you don't know how dreadfully tired I was after the ball, and somehow—but where is the paper, Charlie? I should like to read it before I go to bed; only, you know, you must not expect me to understand all about it, and say clever things like Mrs Strickland does."

The paper, I replied, had last been seen in the immediate neighbourhood of the breakfast urn, and, not having legs, would probably be still in the dining-room. And Eva, giving me one of her sweetest kisses, went down to fetch it, and returning sat down in an easy-chair to read the debate, while I took up a book.

But very shortly her little head began to nod, and in ten minutes she was fast asleep, while the newspaper slipped to the ground.

I stepped across to pick it up, but the rustling of the paper awoke her. She put out her hand, looking conscious and perplexed, to take it again, bu something in my look stopped her.

A little caress, or even a little banter, might have put matters right, and sent my wife to bed with her mind at rest again. But I suppose I looked, like a blockhead that I was, angry or scornful, for Eva was confused and ashamed, and stammering something about being sorry, turned slowly away, and, taking up her candlestick, left the room.

And I suffered her to go off without speaking, but I felt nevertheless that what had happened was even worse than a quarrel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SENSATION HEADER.

My first success as a speaker did not lead me to commit the mistake of troubling the House too often. Above all things one has to avoid in the House being looked upon as a bore; and having observed how one or two men had marred a successful *début* by not knowing when to stop, I forbore from taking a part in even criticising the Estimates, although they were inviting enough to provoke comment, especially when one saw how wide of the mark were most of the attacks made on them in Committee. But, in fact, the Estimates in their present form merely represented the results of our haphazard organisation, which had to be improved by going to the root of things, and not merely by nibbling at stray items, as some ardent young Radicals with more zeal than knowledge seemed to think was the proper way of setting to work. However, I was anxious to have the opportunity of saying something that should fall outside the regular

groove of military subjects, to remove the popular notion that a soldier must not only, above every other class, think that there is nothing like leather, but that he cannot look beyond professional details. It was already quite plain, indeed, that a military man is at a decided disadvantage in coming to the front in military matters; the special knowledge, which would make the political fortune of any young civilian, is taken in his case as a matter of course, and gives him no credit; but far more than this, military rank, unless it be very high rank, acts as a positive disqualification. To the aspiring civilian all things are both possible and easy, if he only has brains and does not stammer; but the soldier, if only a captain as I was, has to work his way up against a strong pressure of prejudice, especially among the members of his own profession.

However, the debate in May on our Canadian policy gave me the desired opportunity of breaking ground in a new line. This time I did not carry every one with me, for people were not prepared to accept at once so novel an idea, which besides jarred against the feelings of many, and was opposed to the first impulse of all; but at any rate I had an attentive hearing, and by anticipating a good many of the stock arguments that were sure to be employed in reply, the force of the speeches that followed was somewhat weakened. Canada might perhaps be regarded as an open question, although even then

the honourable gentlemen who talked so glibly about maintaining the security of the Dominion, had probably but the vaguest idea of the consequences involved in acting upon that principle, should we ever be required to do so; of the enormity of the effort that would be involved, the almost certainty of eventual failure. But, as regards British Columbia, there could be but one conclusion with every rational mind that chose to think out the problem. We might avoid the question, like the ostrich hiding its head in the sand, but the danger was not the less there because we shunned it. People were apt to think that a thing could not happen because they found it difficult to realise the idea, and it was difficult to realise the idea of things which had not happened. Yet, as a matter of fact, we had lost colonies before, and a very bitter draught it was to swallow; and although some people, from confusion of thought, seemed to fancy that the prosperity which arose out of the sudden development of our manufacturing power and the conquest of India was due to the loss of the American colonies which happened simultaneously, there could be no reasonable doubt that the loss of this great portion of the empire was not only felt to be, but was actually a tremendous blow and calamity. It was indeed difficult to realise what might have been the greatness and prosperity of the British empire if this separation had never taken place, or if it had occurred under happier con-

ditions and at a later time; but it is not so difficult to conceive the advantage England would have possessed in the great revolutionary struggle, and the different character that would have been imposed on that war, if she had presented the attitude of a united kingdom on both sides of the Atlantic.

It may be said, indeed, that the separation of the American colonies was indirectly advantageous, for that the identity of England and its character as the centre of the empire could not have been preserved with this enormous addition on the other side of the Atlantic. This argument was certainly not applicable to our connection with British Columbia; but if such a development of the empire as would have arisen from the maintenance of America as an integral part of it, might have brought its special disadvantages, on the other hand the corresponding advantages would be wholly lost in the case of an outlying territory on the Pacific, which could never be a source of strength, but would always be a burden and responsibility.

There was this further difference between the two cases, that America might have been retained by proper management in the first instance, whereas Columbia could not be by any means whatever, if the Americans chose to set about taking it in earnest. But the difference is more apparent than real. The same cause acts under another form. Then, it was bad generalship and blindness to the nature of the

task involved which brought about the disaster; now, it would be bad policy and blindness to the political consequences of it.

Then consider the costliness and the strain on the national life of such a struggle at the present time. It would no longer be a matter of sending forth paltry expeditions to New Orleans, or a trumpery fight about some little West India island, carried on at a distance without disturbing the current of European life and commerce; the struggle would be on as much a greater scale than anything undertaken before, as the last war between France and Germany exceeded the efforts called forth in the days of Louis XIV. There could be no rational doubt on this point. However inadequate the scale on which a war of this sort might be begun, the effort would rise as the magnitude of the task became more clearly apparent to the national mind; the contest would go on increasing and intensifying with the rising passions of the two great peoples engaged; and a proud nation such as ours would only desist when at last the bitter truth became apparent, that no effort and no sacrifices could be sufficient to procure success. And this conviction would not be forced on the national mind till we had arrived at the point of national exhaustion. It would be the story of the Athenians and Syracuse over again; the downfall of a State brought about by wasting its resources in striving against hope to accomplish the impossible.

And all because we would not take warning in time.

Then think of the divisions of public feeling that would arise at home while such a struggle went on, between the men who foresee from the first that the task is hopeless, and those who are for struggling onwards, first from over-confidence, then from pride, lastly from despair. Think too of the political differences that must be created between different classes as the struggle went on, the breaches growing ever wider as the political structure grows weaker; the increase of pauperism keeping pace with, and acting like fuel to the flame of political faction, stimulated too by increasing taxation and decaying commerce. Could the constitution bear this accumulated strain? And for what is the load to be imposed? For some great principle in defence of which a nation equally with an individual may worthily sacrifice its existence? Not a bit. We undergo this certain risk, and retain our prosperity on sufferance, simply and solely because we are too mentally indolent to look our responsibilities in the face, and too deficient in imagination to realise distinctly what will nevertheless be the inevitable result of certain assumed events; too careless to be at the trouble of perceiving, and acting on the perception, that the western world has entered on an entirely new political condition, with which our present colonial system is quite inconsistent.

Of course, I continued, I shall be charged with offering pusillanimous counsel, and it will be said too that I am exposing our weakness to possible antagonists. But foolhardiness is not courage, and this is not even a case of the former quality. We are no more showing bravery by our present attitude of heedlessness, than are the travellers who sit careless in the train, unconscious of the broken bridge ahead. We take the matter so coolly only because the people trust in their rulers, and their rulers look no further forward than themselves. As for divulging secrets, is any one so foolish as to suppose that the Americans do not perfectly appreciate already the vantage-ground they possess under present conditions in any war between the two countries, the absolute certainty of what will happen on the shores of the Pacific, and the calmness, therefore, with which they can await any issue, whether of war or peace? Theirs is the silence of confidence. They know that we stand now just in the same case as would be any foreign nation with regard to us, which had Cornwall or Anglesea in temporary occupation: they hold a mortgage over us which they can foreclose when they please.

True patriotism does not consist in putting dangers out of sight, which are hid only from those who are too blind to see them. True patriotism would divert disaster by timely precaution. I speak because I love my country too well to wish her to be over-weighted

in any contest, and because the danger of war is diminished just in proportion as the temptation is withdrawn from other powers to strike us a blow.

Such is an outline of what I said, and that it was effective might be inferred from my again being honoured by a reply from the Prime Minister himself, although, no doubt, the compliment would have been still greater if he had not been rather in the habit of replying to everybody all round the House on every possible occasion. I confess that, while listening to his speech, the sonorous voice and vigorous declamation with which it was delivered, the ease and fluency of the great speaker, now solemn, now sarcastic, occasionally even humorous, although there was not much of that quality; while it was to a certain extent gratifying to have all this fire, and vigour, and stream of words poured on me, I felt nevertheless somewhat small and uncomfortable. I was very sensible, especially, of the differences between the utterances of the practised debater and the crudeness in delivery of this my second effort, the more so perhaps that the audience would not give me credit for having myself been fully conscious of sundry defects in manner and method, but would be sure to fancy me better pleased with myself than I really was. There was further the contrast in length between the two speeches; for I admit I could not have said what I had to say

in so many words, even if I had tried. Yet, although overborne, as it were, by the power and copiousness of the reply, I must admit that, what between parentheses, and digressions, and limitations, and qualifications, I could not be certain whether the great orator was not, after all, very much of my way of thinking; at any rate, whether his words would not admit of this construction at some future time. This was, indeed, the view taken of the debate by the *Piccadilly* next day; while Mr Braham, later in the evening, was exceedingly sarcastic and vicious about the ambiguity of the right honourable gentleman's utterances, although carefully abstaining from pronouncing any decided opinion himself on the matter.

The papers also drew attention to the speech, perhaps more for something of earnestness in the manner of uttering it, which made an impression within the House that spread out of doors, than on account of its intrinsic merits. The *Dial* observed that it (the *Dial*) only reflected the general feeling and common-sense of the nation, while declaring that the country would never repudiate its duties, nor measure the extent of its liabilities by the difficulties of fulfilling them. The natural instinct of the country would dictate but one reply to such a proposal—namely, that the dignity of the colonial empire should be maintained intact; and if ever a difficulty should arise such as has been referred to, then no doubt circumstances would indicate the proper mode

of action compatible with a due regard to prudence, as well as to the honour and commercial interests of the country; but the general good sense of the people and of Parliament would probably be opposed to framing anticipations regarding a difficulty which, after all, might never occur. The *Unicorn* boldly said that it was pusillanimous and traitorous to suggest to another nation the means of striking the blow which we desired to avert, putting this forward as an original and unanswerable argument. The *Overseer* also gave a long article on the subject, besides three spasmodic paragraphs in its opening pages, partly political and partly prophetic—with a dash of metaphysics, including an analysis of the mental attributes of younger members of Parliament, to the ingenuity of which I could not attempt to do justice by a mere abstract.

The sensation which thus seemed to have been produced in other quarters, was equally to be observed on entering the Union Jack, amid the congratulations received there. Some of my good friends, indeed, whose politics were rather pronounced than distinct, hardly knew what to make of the manifesto. Thus when a bystander in the smoking-room asked Colonel Pyghed if he had seen the *Overseer*, that gallant officer replied that he should rather think he had not, nor the *Daily Eclectic* either; he knew better than to read either one or the other; the paper *he* went by was the *Unicorn*. Everbody knew that Merrifield

wrote all the articles in the *Eclectic*. "I suppose he earns a few halfpence by it," added my gallant friend, "and I'm sure I don't grudge it him, poor beggar, for there's no doubt he is as poor as a church mouse; literally hasn't got one sixpence to rub against another." From which any one who had been accustomed to read the cynical utterances of the *Eclectic* regarding that brilliant statesman, and the half-hearted support it gave to him, might at once accept Colonel Pyghed's assertion that he had not read the articles which he assigned to Mr Merrifield's pen. All which is an illustration of the impossibility of getting read nowadays. Republican organs denounce a bloated aristocracy and effete monarchism, and supporters of those institutions are scornfully sarcastic about demagogism, but each party nourishes its principles on its own diet; aristocrats do not wax fat on the effusions of the Hole-in-the-Wall, and it is only an occasional kid-glove disciple of the Marat or Robespierre school who hears what is said about him and his friends in more refined circles.

Perhaps the best indication of the effect of my effort on the public mind was the approbation accorded by my friend Murphy, of the Artillery and the War Office, the next time I met him in Pall Mall. "I tell you what it is, West," said he, "if you go on as you have begun, the Government will be sure to take you up by-and-by. Yes, you may smile, but I am quite serious; I am behind the scenes, and I know

well enough that if a man makes speeches and that sort of thing, he's quite sure to get taken up in time. Bless you! the Government are glad enough to get hold of a clever fellow when they can find him. I tell you what, I wouldn't mind betting anything that you are in office before half-a-dozen years are over; paymaster-general very likely, or something of that sort. And then, my boy, it's your own fault if you don't get along. You may easily make your way into something snug. A colonial governorship, perhaps, or even the permanent under-secretaryship. By Jove! that's the berth to get. No five years' limitation and a swinking salary. Upon my word, my dear fellow, I assure you I am heartily glad to see you have made such a hit." All which I took to mean that Murphy regarded me as a man who had done him an injury by presuming to take up a line beyond his own course, but that he was nevertheless prepared to condone the offence in consideration of my success.

With this second speech my oratorical efforts ended for the present; but various opportunities occurred for taking part in military discussions, when, however, I was careful not to speak unless I had something which seemed worth saying, and which involved a matter of principle rather than detail. The Government, I think, hardly knew what to make of me, for sometimes I tried to poke fun at their efforts in the way of army organisation, while at others, when they

seemed to be moving in the right direction, I did my little best to back them up, to the annoyance apparently of the other side of the House, who thought they had got hold of a convert. But the waste of power involved in party government, and the absurdity of making every question a party question, is never more apparent than in dealing with army business. It must be added, that in those days, when party ties were coming to be but slack on both sides of the House, the number of independent members was already large enough to render such a phenomenon no longer surprising.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MIDNIGHT CONVERSATION.

HOWEVER, on one night we had been rather warmer than usual in committee, and I was walking up Great George Street, feeling a little vexed with myself for having said more than I intended, more especially as my remarks seemed on reflection to savour too much of the "mere soldier," a *rôle* I was so anxious to avoid, whereas I had intended to express the opinion that it was not the insufficiency of our army expenditure so much as the mode of its application that called for objection. Mr Merrifield especially would be sure to misunderstand me. Pondering over this and feeling annoyed at having thus lost ground, I was pursuing my way slowly homewards, when I heard myself addressed by some one overtaking me. There could be no mistaking that clear voice, the peculiar ring differing from that of any other in the House; it was the great Minister himself.

I confess to feeling a little fluttered. For an or-

dinary member who has no private acquaintance with him it is considered in the House rather a compliment to be spoken to by the head of the Government, but here was I being sought out for a private chat. Why is it that we feel a certain nervousness in the presence of great people? It is not always from a sense of superior mental power, for the sensation is as vivid when the superiority is merely social. It cannot be from a sense of other power, such as a captive might feel in the presence of a conquering Cæsar or Chenghiz, for we experience it equally in cases where our independence is complete. Does it not arise rather from a sense of pride, founded on a sympathy with the just expectations of the great person in question, be he general, minister, or kaiser, that his condescension may not be taken advantage of, and the dignity circumstances surround him with broken through? A feeling, in short, that since the temporary connection is a voluntary one on his part, it behoves you to be especially careful not to presume upon it?

Such at any rate must I think be my state of mind at this moment, for nothing could be more unaffected than Mr Merrifield's manner, and had he been any one else instead of the first commoner in England I should have been thoroughly at my ease, which I am bound to say I was not.

"I cannot for the life of me understand, Captain West," he began, "how it is that you military men

are such alarmists. There really seems to be no satisfying your demands. Look at what has been done during these last few years, and yet to hear you and others of your cloth talk, one might suppose the country was perfectly defenceless."

"Defenceless in one sense only, sir, so far as my judgment goes. I look on any fear of invasion under present circumstances as being quite a delusion; but surely we are defenceless to this extent, that we are perfectly unprepared to fulfil our engagements abroad. In that sense it seems to me to be true to say that the country is defenceless. It could not at the present time protect its honour if called upon to do so."

This word honour was an unhappy one to use. Not that Mr Merrifield is not a highly honourable man, but because it carried him off at a tangent, giving him a notion that I was talking in the regular professional slang, a relic of the old pistols-and-coffee days, as one looking out for some foreign nation to tread on our British coat-tails.

"There it is," said he, poking the end of his umbrella vehemently into the muddy gravel, for we were now crossing St James's Park; "this comes of keeping up professional soldiers. We maintain an army to defend us, and they must needs of course be always casting about for fanciful obligations by way of finding occupation. When will mankind come to see the wickedness of war?"

"I may at least claim to go beyond you in detesta-

tion of war, Mr Merrifield, since it has been my fortune, or misfortune, to see something of its reality. And one must see actual war fully to appreciate its worst side. I think wars and fighting utterly abominable; and it seems to me to show how conventional and insincere is our Christianity, that here, at the end of the nineteenth century, we should have no better way of settling disputes. But it won't put an end to war for one country alone to look on quietly at oppression and injustice, because unable to interfere and prevent them."

"I am very glad to find you think so," said the Minister, stopping short and turning towards me; "for I certainly should not have gathered that your opinions went in that direction, from what I have heard you say in the House. Still it passes my comprehension how any reasonable man can seriously propose that England should burden herself by competing with the Continental nations, and maintain a gigantic military establishment merely to keep the peace all over Europe."

Here, then, was a temptation to unfold my views; but it must be resisted. There was clearly not time to talk an essay on military policy between Waterloo Place and Mr Merrifield's house. Nor would it do to button-hole a Prime Minister in the street. Conversation under such conditions must be condensed.

"Mr Merrifield, you are nothing if not an economist, if I may take the liberty of saying so. Is it

not desirable that the nation should have its money's worth for its money? Why administer the army on archaic principles, rusty armour mingled with fire-arms? This mode of doing business would not be tolerated in the other departments. Surely common-sense should obtain in army affairs as in every other branch of the public service."

"You speak as if nothing had been done in this way. Have we not been hard at work already for years past, ploughing up abuses and sowing reforms broadcast?"

"In my humble opinion we have scarcely done more than scratch the surface. But I have been detaining you too long. I wish you good-night." And I turned off, becoming aware as I did so that a silent part in our conversation had been taken by the old lady who superintends the crossing at the top of the steps by the Duke of York's column, and who now, with a vacant simper, awaited the penny which a sense of gallantry seldom permitted my withholding when passing that way! Poor old thing! you, too, have, in dim sort, your warlike instincts; for only last week you were engaged in personal encounter with another venerable female, the porter who guards the column exercising the while, in imitation of the nation he serves, a malevolent neutrality, for he looked on with cynical approval, deaf to my appeal to him to stop the fray, so that I had myself to undertake the duty of enforcing peace, my umbrella

interposed between the hostile broomsticks. Would that Mr Merrifield could have witnessed this illustration of my pacific sentiments!

As it was, I wended my way homeward, feeling but half satisfied with the interview, as generally happens after interrupted conversations. I did not feel sure, on the one hand, that I had made myself thoroughly understood; on the other, I was a little uneasy lest I might have appeared to the Minister to have been what schoolboys call "sucking up" to him. However, the impression left must apparently have been a good one on the whole; for about a fortnight afterwards, when, owing to Mr Thorowcome's lamented retirement from office, and Lord Stowe's promotion to be Secretary of State for War, a general shuffling took place of minor places, leaving the Paymaster-Generalship to the Forces vacant as the final result, I received a kindly-expressed note from Mr Merrifield offering that post to me.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FIRST GLIMPSE OF ELEUSIS.

THERE is a latent fund of capriciousness in most human beings which makes them difficult to satisfy. Here was I, who had achieved an amount of Parliamentary success in a few weeks as far exceeding my own expectations as those of anybody else; yet when the opportunity was now given me to place my feet on the official ladder, the goal of all my hopes, thus unexpectedly available to climb; this first necessary progress accomplished, I yet found myself actually deliberating whether or not I should accept the Premier's offer. My doubt, so far as it admitted of being analysed, arose partly from a suspicion that the offer was made not so much as a tribute to my merits, as in view to gagging a man who might prove troublesome, for office has a wonderfully deodorising effect on the most malignant political miasma. At any rate, whether the design were intentional or not, there could be no doubt such would be the practical effect of taking

subordinate office. A junior member of the Government, I well knew, was expected to speak only to the cue, while of course his independence is in great measure gone. Supposing then that I really had the capacity for attaining distinction, should I not take higher ground by holding on longer to the part of an independent member, and waiting for an opportunity of entering office hereafter in a higher place with a Parliametary reputation already made?

Such were the uneasy promptings of ambition. Looking round me, and back over the history of the past few years, the lower courses of the governmental pyramid seemed to be made up of men of fair promise, whose career stopped short at the point of achieving some small office, while half-a-dozen of the leading men could be named who had never been anything else but leading men, starting off at score in the first flight as Cabinet Ministers. Even Perkyman of the Opposition side began his official career as a full Secretary of State. But then, on the other hand, some of the ablest men of either party had made quite a humble beginning: Mr (or as he was generally called by people who did not know him, Tommy) Sinnick, for example, and even Mr Merrifield himself, taking office first in subordinate posts, and working their way up by degrees more or less rapidly to high place. Clearly, then, a man's career must depend after all upon himself, and not

upon the accident of entering office early or late. Besides, what I particularly stood in need of was official experience. My mind, therefore, was soon made up, as indeed no doubt it had been really from the first, for my pretence of weighing the pros and cons of the case hardly imposed upon myself; and accordingly I sat down and wrote a note to the Prime Minister accepting his gratifying offer, and my appointment to be Paymaster-General of the Forces was announced in the second edition of that evening's *Piccadilly*, where, however, it occupied quite an obscure corner; and people were so occupied in discussing Lord Stowe's succession to Mr Thorowcome as War Minister, and the other great political changes involved by the latter statesmen's lamented retirement from office in the prime of life, that this small matter of the disposal of the Paymaster-Generalship passed almost unnoticed, except perhaps by my own acquaintances and the official world; and my vanity was flattered by finding at a dinner-party that evening that not a soul in the room was aware that the guests included a member of the Government. But then it was not a political party, and the people could not have read their *Piccadilly* before setting out for it.

Next morning the first thing to be done was to resign my seat in Parliament, and set about getting re-elected—a very easy matter I found, and not even involving a visit to Leatherby, the good people of

which snug little place had become so accustomed to be represented by a Government official, as naturally to regard my appointment in the light of a tribute to their own sagacity in having chosen me for their member. This business having been set on foot, we left town the same day on a promised visit to Mr Paterson, who had taken a house at Ascot during the races, so that although I confess to having been affected with a burning impatience to enter on my new office, the ceremony must needs be deferred till our return home, and even then I was somewhat puzzled how to act, having heard nothing further on the subject from Mr Merrifield or anybody else, and not knowing what might be the process of installing a Paymaster-General to the Forces. However, my election being now declared, and in the absence of any further communication on the subject—for the discovery of Lady Elizabeth Merrifield's card on the hall table when we returned from Ascot hardly bore on the subject officially—I put on my hat next morning about noon and walked down to the office in Pall Mall.

There were two or three messengers sitting about in the dingy lobby which did duty for the main entrance, and addressing the one who seemed least preoccupied with his newspaper, I asked if Lord Stowe were in. The man, who seemed properly scandalised at the idea of an unknown individual demanding to see the Minister, immediately replied

that his lordship was engaged; what was the nature of my business? On my giving my name, however, he immediately apologised and conducted me to the new Secretary of State's room. And here let me say at once that, so far as my experience goes, these office-messengers are a very good set of fellows. They lead an apparently lazy life, but that is just what they are paid to do; their business is always to be ready when wanted, to be always in fact loitering over the newspapers. If occasionally somewhat crusty with outsiders, it must be remembered that they are continually pestered by impracticable visitors and callers making foolish inquiries, or asking for impossible information; but they seemed to me to be trustworthy and obliging, and to have especially the difficult knack of serving a great many masters. Their foible, so far as I could make out, was in holding a thinly-concealed cheapness of estimate for the Parliamentary sub-officials of the office, whom they appeared to regard as a sort of needless excrescence attached to it by Providence to prevent the routine working properly. I thought I could always detect in the man's face who brought me papers to initial—especially at first—an expression of tolerant forbearance implying that he regarded the proceeding as one of those unmeaning forms required by the exigencies of Parliamentary government, and that the business in his opinion would be far better done if we did not meddle with the disposal of it by the permanent officials.

My predecessor in the affections of the Leatherby electors, whom oddly enough I had never met before, was a well-preserved man of sixty, with a high forehead, a prim, close-shaven face, and thin compressed lips that might signify great force of character, or might signify nothing of the kind, according as the facts turned out; the sort of face that would have appeared suitable to any sphere in life. Had you met Lord Stowe in a railway carriage, and been told by your companion in a whisper that he was a director of the Bank of England, you would at once have replied that he looked exactly like what a bank director might be expected to be. Had you been told that he was the managing clerk of a large city firm, the natural answer would have been that he looked just the man for the post. The same judgment might have been passed had the spruce face set off the figure of an elderly clerk in Somerset House; while it seemed a very suitable figurehead for a steady-going Minister who had now worked his way up to a place in the Cabinet. Whether Lord Stowe was a man to lead others, or be led by them, his face showed no more than do the faces of most other people, whose characters we are in the habit of inferring with accuracy from their features whenever we happen to know all about them beforehand.

"Ha, Captain West," said he, "how do you do? Very glad indeed to make your acquaintance, and very glad indeed to welcome you as a colleague.

And how are they all getting on at Leatherby? A very snug little place, isn't it? I really must try to get down there and see my worthy old friends again, some day."

"Old friends indeed; I believe your lordship represented them for over twenty years."

"Nearer twenty-five: you see the place suited me very well; there was no trouble about it, thanks to our excellent friend Sheepshanks, and very little expense, and I believe I suited them; I was able to advance local interests in one or two little matters, you see, as well as to help on one or two of the deserving young men. I had the advantage over you there, ha! ha! Patronage, I'm afraid, doesn't go beyond the office-messengers nowadays." From which short dialogue I inferred that Lord Stowe would probably not go down and see his worthy old friends—at any rate until business might take him to those parts.

Well, now, his lordship proceeded, as to the work of the office. He was, like myself, quite new to the place, and greatly altered it seemed to be since he was in the department before, fifteen years ago. But one department was pretty much like another, he thought, and we should no doubt all soon get into smooth working order. As to distribution of work? Well, he hardly knew yet how that was arranged, but of course all important papers came to him before they were disposed of, and Tregarth (he

was the permanent Under-Secretary) kept a general control over everything. "Brings all the official strands together to work them up into a proper cable, you understand, as we used to say, when I was at the Admiralty."

Then, continued the Secretary of State, we must look to the heads of departments to keep us all square. A very able set of men, were the permanent heads of all the public offices. Very good here as elsewhere, but he didn't know if he altogether liked their system of docketing. They did the docketing best at the Board of Commerce, he thought. Yes, no doubt I was right, and there was a very great deal to be done in the department, although, certainly, Thorowcome would appear to have done a great deal already; a man with very sound judgment was poor Thorowcome, and great official experience. Still it was, as I very truly remarked, an extremely responsible office, and an extremely important time to have charge of it—very much so, indeed. He was very glad to think he should have the benefit of my practical experience, and no doubt we should have many important deliberations together, and he hoped I should always proffer advice freely, whenever I saw occasion to do so.

I thought that a very great effort would be needed, did I? and that the proper path of army reform had yet to be discovered and entered upon? Well, that was an interesting question, but he was disposed to

take a more sanguine view of matters. The people in the office seemed to think that things were going on very well; the audit was very efficient, and the control over the stores seemed complete and satisfactory. However, of course I would look into these matters, and make any suggestions that occurred to me. There was one thing he ought to mention. We must be prepared, at any rate, for a certain amount of reduction in next's year's estimates, of course; there had been no reduction to speak of for the last two years, and the public would probably be [illegible] to raise a cry for it about next year. I [illegible] such a cry would be resisted, did I? he for his part was prepared to resist any due change, but these things I knew were very much matters of degree, and in such affairs Government must be satisfied to follow public opinion, rather than to lead it. It was usually the safest course. Besides, Mr Merrifield would probably wish for reductions, Sinnick (Mr Sinnick was Chancellor of the Exchequer) would be certain to do so, and Bracton (Bracton was the Parliamentary Under-Secretary) seemed to think there was abundant room for retrenchment.

As to distribution of business? Well, as he was in the Upper House, the arrangements made by Mr Thorowcome would no doubt need to be modified. Bracton, of course, would have to move the estimates next year, and he and I would divide the answering

of questions, and the general business of the Commons, between us. I knew Bracton, of course? "No! Then let us go to his room and I will introduce you;" and so saying, his lordship got up and led the way to the Under-Secretary's room, which was just at the end of the passage.

We found Mr Bracton walking up and down, with his hands in his pockets, dictating to a private secretary sitting at the table. "Well," said Lord Stowe, after the introduction, "I shall leave you gentlemen to discuss matters together. You will find Captain [illegible] full of practical ideas, Bracton, a most valuable [illegible]ague, I am sure," and so saying he quitted the room; and the private secretary also slipping away, Mr Bracton and I fell to conversation, Mr Bracton standing in the middle of the room with his hands in his pockets, and I sitting on his table for want of the offer of a chair.

CHAPTER XXVII.

INTRODUCES SOME DISTINGUISHED OFFICIALS.

THE Right Honourable John Bracton began life, I believe, as a West Indian planter, and after achieving a moderate fortune in that line, returned home and entered Parliament as member for a very Radical manufacturing town in the north on an extreme Radical platform, which, so far as could be gathered indirectly from various hints scattered through his speeches, both in and out of Parliament, embraced a general cutting down of everything, the estimates, the army and navy, the bishops, the aristocracy, and even it might be inferred still more exalted institutions; and since Mr Bracton did not, like some members of the Liberal school, wear his hair long, or part it in the middle, or lisp, but spoke with point and sense in a dogged, stubborn manner, and was as bold in the House as out of it, he promised to become a somewhat important element in the political world, possibly a leader eventually of the extreme Left. But when, shortly after Mr Merrifield's Ministry was first formed, a murmur arose among the organs of that branch of the

party, low at first, but gaining force as it was echoed from one to the other, as to the claims of the extreme Left to a larger share of office, and it was soon asked with outspoken indignation, whether the real representatives of the people were to be made a cat's-paw of to help the old Whigs to office, and then be left themselves out in the cold: when questions like this appeared in brilliant articles in papers of world-wide circulation, and were repeated in high-class Liberal papers, it became evident that the Government would rest on an uneasy basis unless some lateral extension were carried out. Intelligent supporters therefore commended Mr Merrifield's astuteness when it was announced that Mr Bracton had accepted the Vice-Presidency of the Board of Commerce; while even those members of the Government who were disposed to hold their noses in the air and look askance at their new companion, soon came round to the same opinion on finding how great was the addition to their peace of mind, the whilome thorn in the Government garden being now transformed into quite a fragrant flower in the Government button-hole. Instead of being badgered themselves, they now had a badger of their own to snarl defiance from the Treasury tub at the Opposition and at gentlemen below the gangway, like another Diogenes, and quite as cynical. But when, taking advantage of the numerous changes which befel his Ministry, the Premier advanced Mr Bracton to be Minister of Cultus and a

Privy Councillor, people said Merrifield had gone too far, and that his strength in this respect would prove a weakness. Their fears were soon justified when the new Minister set to work in his trenchant style, pulling about the pillars of the Church. For a time, indeed, he carried a party with him. So long as he confined himself to the Establishment all went well: his select committee on the deans and chapters; his proposal to whitewash Westminster Abbey instead of wasting money on restoring the stonework; even his celebrated letter to the Archbishop, which set the *Parish Beadle*—organ of the High Church party—frantic; while these things went on the *Register* and the Nonconformists looked on approvingly. But when Mr Bracton took charge of the Government Public Worship Bill, which enacted that everybody should be required to attend church or chapel every Sunday morning; and when he explained that this provision would apply to every able-bodied subject, Dissenter as well as Churchman, then my new acquaintance found he had raised a regular hornet's nest about himself and the Government. Of the reception the right honourable gentleman met with when he went down to visit his constituents; how, when he endeavoured to obtain a hearing at the meeting and to point out that the Bill for the first time placed Dissenters on the same footing with Churchmen, he was yelled down by the indignant mob; how finally, after the platform had been in-

vaded, a vote of want of confidence in their member —who held his ground among the roughs with dogged pluck—was unanimously carried, till finally the tumult was quelled by the arrival of the police; how, as indignation became general, explanations were offered in the House that it was not intended to enforce the Act, except in the case of women and children and such adult males as did not object to obey it; how, after all its leading provisions had been whittled away in committee, the Bill was eventually withdrawn amid derisive cheers on both sides of the House, and jubilations from all sections of the press; all this is matter of history. But Mr Merrifield took the hint, and when the various Ministerial changes occurred to which reference has been made, the opportunity was seized to transfer the too zealous Minister to his present office. Let me add, however, that I found my new acquaintance a very good fellow —very different from what he was popularly supposed to be; intolerant of stupidity, indeed, but really anxious to save the public purse; who kept his cynicism for the outer world, and having now sown his political wild oats, promised to develop into a useful and discreet public official.

Not, however, that we appeared to have many ideas in common on the matter just now in hand. "Of course you know what I have been sent to this shop for," he observed; "going down in the world, you see this is, to become a mere Under-Secretary;

although, to be sure, when the head of the department is in the Lords, it makes a difference. However, I have no doubt there is plenty to be done here."

I asked him what he thought of the office.

"Well, one public office is pretty much the same as another, I take it; only some have too many clerks, and others only just about enough. This is one of the first lot, I suspect; but I have not had time to go into the thing yet, for I am a new-comer, like yourself. But one must look about and see what there is to retrench. Plenty of room for that, I fancy. Thorowcome, you know, was on the building-up lay all the time he was here, so there is sure to be plenty of stuff to be pulled down, if you set about it."

"No doubt," I observed, "we ought to be on the look-out for all reductions that can properly be made. Anything superfluous is waste, and waste of public money is wicked. But the first thing is, I apprehend, to find out what you really do want, and arrange accordingly."

"Oh, as to that—although I don't profess to know much about military matters, which haven't been at all in my line—I fancy you have got pretty nearly everything you want in the way of an army, and a good deal more. Anyhow, I know Merrifield and Tommy Sinnick will look for retrenchment from me. And, between ourselves, Burley is said to be a good man for that sort of thing. But, dear me, it is nearly

two o'clock, and I ought to have been on a committee of the House at twelve. Ta-ta! you will soon settle down into the ways of the place." And so saying, Mr Bracton took his hat and hurried out of the room.

The next thing to do appeared to be to find my own room, to which accordingly I was conducted by a messenger whom I found waiting in the hall—a comfortable if somewhat dingy room, furnished with a writing-table, a bookcase, and a few chairs. On the table was a little bookstand, containing various editions of the 'Army List,' the 'Navy List,' 'Who's Who,' the 'London Directory,' and other periodicals of the same useful character. The drawers of the table I found on examination to be empty, except the top one on the right hand, which appeared to be a repository for spare half-sheets of notes and other scraps of paper—whence I inferred my predecessor must be a man of sound economic habits—a penknife, a strop, and a broken paper-cutter. While engaged in these investigations, the messenger entered with the *Dial* of the day—which, in the absence of an occupant of the room, he had been surreptitiously reading—and asking if I would not like some writing materials, presently returned with an assortment of that stout, glossy paper affected by Government officials, and last, but not least, some bundles of that useful but much-abused article, red tape.

But although thus provided with the sinews of

war, no sound of battle came near me. All was as silent as the grave; and while walking up and down the room, amused and perplexed, I descried in the bookcase a copy of the 'Report of the Eighteenth Committee on the Organisation of the Artillery.' Truly here was a first glimpse of the sweets of office. Here was this report, which, although printed, was so far a private and confidential document, and the source of endless surmises and expectations in all regimental circles, lying quietly on the shelf, just as if it had been an ordinary magazine. I took it up, and, absorbed in its fascinating contents, had just come to that interesting discussion at page 32, whether the foot artillery should be styled brigades or battalions, when the messenger entered with a note. It was from my predecessor, Mr Alister, recommending his late private secretary, one Roundhand, to my notice, in case I should not have any one in view for the appointment. Being a perfect stranger to every one in the office, I gladly closed with the proposal, and presently, on a message being sent him, Mr Roundhand entered the room, a nice-looking little fellow, who might be five-and-twenty, but was really I learned afterwards ten years older. No doubt the interregnum in the Paymaster-Generalship had been an anxious time for my new friend, to whom, since he was a junior clerk (salary £150, rising by annual increments to £400), the additional £150 of a private secretary was a considerable mat-

ter, to say nothing of the superior dignity of the position and the privilege of a room to himself. Nor had I any reason to regret the selection.

To my inquiries whether the duties of my office were always of the nominal character indicated by the present empty state of my table, Roundhand replied by explaining that the office probably did not know of my arrival. I should soon find plenty to do if I felt disposed to do it. In fact, my department was the heaviest in the office, four hundred and odd letters a-day being registered in it.

Did Mr Alister, I asked, read all the four hundred and odd letters?

Oh, dear, no; most of them were merely routine, and disposed of by the different branches; the head clerks of branches exercised their discretion about sending up letters; but I could always see as many cases as I desired, and some would have to go on to Lord Stowe.

Under these circumstances, the first thing to be done seemed to be to make the acquaintance of the different officials; and accordingly, accompanied by my young friend, I went the round of the senior permanent officials, paying a few minutes' visit to each, a proceeding which I have reason to suppose was favourably regarded, inasmuch as the ordinary course would have been to ask them to come and see me, although I am not quite sure Murphy did not think I had come to enjoy a little triumph over him,

and he was by no means at his ease when he received me in his room. And then deferring till next day my initiation into the mysteries of routine and the disposal of the four hundred and odd letters registered daily, I walked out to lunch at the Union Jack, and afterwards going down to the House, took my seat meekly, as became a new and subordinate member of the Government, on the extreme top of the Treasury bench.

Business, however, began almost immediately, for on the following Monday I received a note from Bracton as follows: "Got the mulligrubs, and shan't be able to go to the House to-day; Quheerie and Spendtick have questions; will you please tackle them. The people in the office will do the needful." And accordingly, when I went down there, I found that Roundhand had two half-sheets of foolscap ready for me, on the top of each of which was posted the printed question, cut out from the Parliamentary Notices, with a cut-and-dried answer written below, in a clear, clerkly hand. Fortified with this information, I took my seat on the bench as before, and made my first Ministerial statement. Rising after each question, and taking off my hat gracefully, after approved manner, I had to state, in reply to the noble lord's question, that it is not in contemplation by her Majesty's Government to serve out bearskins to all volunteer corps of the same pattern as those worn by the Guards; and again, making the impor-

tant announcement that the question of supplying half-and-half instead of bitter ale to the troops in the West Indies was in course of investigation by a committee, whose report would be taken into consideration by the Secretary of State as soon as it was ready.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNFOLDING OF THE MYSTERIES.

HAVING thus donned official harness, I now set about applying myself seriously to work, and soon found that, as Roundhand had said, there was plenty to be done, if you only chose to do it. My first discovery was that the office was divided, or was supposed to be divided, into three main departments. First, the Personal, or Military Branch, which dealt with discipline, and so forth; but although nominally a branch of the office, and under the same roof, we kept it at a proper distance. It was a recognised principle of business, I found in the other branches, never to let this one see their part of the work, and never to consult it about anything, if they could possibly avoid doing so. Next, the Store Branch, under the Storekeeper-General, Lieutenant-General Sir Mordaunt Burley, K.C.B., who also had not been very long appointed, and who, like myself, was intended to have a seat in Parliament, but had not been able to find one yet. Third, the Money Branch,

under the Paymaster-General. But these names, I soon found, were quite delusive. I naturally supposed at first that, as Paymaster-General, I should have to pay everything, but it appeared that I merely had to do with the pay of the troops, which was a very different matter. All stores were paid for by the Storekeeper-General, and likewise all food and supplies; and since the expenditure on these made up about three-fourths of the total army outlay, my functions were in reality much more limited than my title would imply. But, further, I had only to do with the bare pay of the troops. All allowances, travelling bills, and so forth, were dealt with by the Storekeeper-General; and as these comprised all the cases of difficulty which arose, they formed really a much more important branch of the pay department than the pay department itself. It is not easy to make mistakes about the amount of pay a soldier is entitled to; but as there were no specific rules about travelling charges or contingent items, but each case could be dealt with from an original point of view, according to the idiosyncrasies of the clerk whose hands it fell into, one travelling bill might afford scope for as much ingenuity in manipulation and references as twenty muster-rolls. In fact, the office, although nominally of three parts, virtually consisted of one. The Personal Branch was of little or no account, and the Money Branch of not much more; both had been swallowed up in the omnivorous Store

Branch, to which even the district paymasters were subordinate. It is true that we took our share in snubbing and keeping down the Personal Branch, a duty which we never lost an occasion of doing; and even as regards the Stores and Miscellaneous Expenditure we came upon the scene at a later period, it being our function, besides checking the pay of the troops, to audit the accounts of the whole department, so that we could nominally claim to sit upon the proceedings of the Store Branch; but inasmuch as they were the parties who authorised their own expenditure, this post-audit was, in fact, pretty much a matter of form.

This, however, was merely a theoretical distribution of work. The heads of the three Branches were supposed to deal with the business arising out of them respectively, or as much of it as the permanent officials sent up to them, referring important cases to the Secretary of State, while the two Under-Secretaries kept themselves generally informed of what went on. And if business would have only divided itself specifically in this fashion into three heads, the office might have worked away merrily enough; but unfortunately the facts were too strong for the organisers. You can't separate men from things, least of all soldiers from their arms, and clothes, and food. And in fact not a question arose, but all three Branches came into play. If it were a matter of fortifications, for example, the Military people first

of all had to say what was wanted, whereupon the Storekeeper-General cut in and made them show cause why anything whatever should be wanted, or at any rate why the thing should not be something altogether different from what was said to be wanted: why, for instance, four guns should not be mounted on the left face of the south ravelin of Fort Albert-Edward, instead of seven guns on the right face; and whether, having due regard to all the circumstances of the case, ten-inch smooth-bores, of which there happened to be a large supply in store, would not do instead of twelve-inch rifled guns. For all the members of the S. G. Branch, as they used to be called, from the S. G. himself down to the junior copying-clerk, appeared to consider it to be their special mission to make the army use up its surplus stores; in fact the army, in their view, was deemed to exist mainly for this object, and they were constantly on the look-out for opportunities to get rid of these obsolete articles. The ten-inch smooth-bores, I remember, sat very heavy on the departmental stomach, and whenever a new ship was commissioned, a proposal used to go down to Whitehall to try this novel armament upon her. The Admiralty, however, which had a fine contempt for economy, laughed us to scorn, and even the engineers, who were usually the meekest of men and could be trampled upon to any extent, were obdurate on the subject of these smooth-bores for their fortifications.

Then again there were a lot of worn-out old Enfields, which were always being hawked about the country. We thought we had got rid of them on a certain militia regiment, and indeed we very nearly succeeded, but the lord-lieutenant of the county, the Duke of Kingston, who was a leading member of the Opposition, got scent of the matter, and made such a slashing speech in the House of Lords as set the whole S. G. Branch a-trembling, and even caused Lord Stowe to inquire into the matter. There was a batch of old saddles, too, which gave the department a moral indigestion. A committee of us, Burley, the Chief Deputy-Storekeeper, and myself, went down to Woolwich to look at them, coming back of course much the wiser; and after trying in vain to foist them on to some yeomanry corps in the north, eventually I think we handed them over to the India Board. India, indeed, was in our eyes a sort of military dusthole, into which could be shot all rubbish in the way of obsolete arms and equipments, with this difference, however, that everything supplied in that quarter used always to be most handsomely paid for.

In this sort of work the S. G. Branch had the pull over us. We had not the power of initiation which they possessed, and which they certainly worked to advantage, for the British soldier could not live without food and clothes, so that the S. G., or his officials in his name, could come down upon him at every

point, making the unfortunate man show cause why he should not have boots served out which he could not walk in, why he should not go to Canada in light flannels, and take an extra thick greatcoat with him to India, and so on *ad infinitum*. So with the cavalry and artillery, there was not a thing that was wanted or a thing to be done that some zealous official, young or old, could not make the subject of a query —always in the interests of the public service and to save expense—and a query-paper once set agoing, it gathered matter round it like a rolling snowball, and quite a pretty little volume would often be made out of a matter about which less experienced officials might have thought it impossible to cover even a sheet of foolscap. I remember one very good illustration of this, the first that came under my notice, where the Controller at Drymouth having purchased a wheelbarrow, it was discovered that there were several spare wheelbarrows in store at Liffeytown. Here at once was a case; for it was one of Burley's cardinal rules, founded on obvious grounds of economy, that no one should buy stores of any kind without first inquiring of "the Department" whether any such were available at other stations. Accordingly "the Department" came down on the local Controller like a sledge-hammer, calling on him to show cause why he had purchased the wheelbarrow, and why he should not make good the cost thereof himself, and so forth; and that zealous, but incau-

tious official did not get out of the scrape under three or four quires of foolscap, and I will be bound to say will take good care never to buy a wheelbarrow or anything else for the future on his own responsibility. But this case, of which the S. G. Branch from Sir Mordaunt Burley downwards, were justly proud, was really due to the intelligence of a quite subordinate clerk, one Mr Trubbell Soame, a very rising young official, unequalled at ferreting out irregularities, and lately promoted to be Burley's private secretary.

But on the other hand we were not wanting for our part to the cause of economy and good administration. If the Paymaster-General came on the scene later than the Storekeeper-General, he could be very effective when he did come. If the S. G. Branch had the pull over us in being able to initiate, yet after they had had their fling at a case, they were bound to hand it over to our Branch, in order—as the Warrant which defined our duties expressed it—"that the matter may be considered in its financial bearings." And consider it in its financial bearings we did, and no mistake. Moreover, the same clause gave us a claim to cut in at any point, for there is hardly anything that has not its financial aspect if you can only discover it. Accordingly, what between the S. G. and the P. G. (as in the slang of the office the functionary whose post I had the honour to fill was styled), the British army was capitally looked after.

Perhaps the triumph of ingenuity was illustrated by the Cinque Port court-martial, which occasioned quite an excitement in the department. It might be thought that a court-martial if anything would have been beyond our line, but nevertheless we were able to bring that famous clause of the Warrant, "in order that the matter may be considered, &c.," to bear with great effect; for not only did the president of the Court purchase a packet of quill-pens at three-and-ninepence from a local stationer, but he had a witness brought up from a neighbouring village by a one-horse fly, whereas it would have been cheaper by eighteenpence to send him round by rail, *via* Cockayne-on-Sea and St Augustine. The first, of course, was a clear case. W. O. Circular No. $\frac{2}{11}\frac{8}{9}\frac{4}{6}$, prescribes distinctly that presidents of courts-martial shall indent for stationery on the nearest controller. So we handed the case over to the S. G. Branch, when Burley, who went into it himself, discovered by means of returns obtained from twenty-seven stations in the United Kingdom, that the average price of quill-pens was only two-and-eightpence, wherefore the purchaser was clearly liable for the difference. The other point was a more doubtful one, because the president of the court argued—and the general commanding the district supported him—that although the railway fare might be cheaper than the fly, still the witness would have had to stop eight hours at each junction, and would have put in

a claim for refreshment expenses. We declined, however, to recognise indirect claims of this sort; and when the president finally lost his temper in his reply to our thirteenth letter of reference, we triumphantly terminated the correspondence by handing him over to the Personal Branch to be reprimanded for disrespect.

If the S. G. Branch had their Trubbell Soame, we, for our part, could boast our O'Verduit, a young Irishman, and a splendid sample of the effect of open competition on the public service; and the two branches regarded these promising officials as their respective champions, and used, so to speak, to pit them one against the other. The wheelbarrow case was very highly thought of in the office, and justly held by the office to reflect great credit on the former; but O'V. had been known to find out thirty-six objections to a single contingent bill for three pound ten, a feat admitted to be quite unsurpassed in the annals of the department.

But these cases were comparatively simple. It was not often that a case could be finally disposed of in one branch, for stores and finance overlap at every point, and then we used to keep the ball rolling in splendid style, sending the case to and fro from one side of the office to the other, minuting and counter-minuting, till it often became quite a puzzle to know what it was all about. Almost the first case that came before me was one of this sort. It

appeared that a battery of horse-artillery marched from Aldershot to Woolwich, with orders to halt for the night at Hounslow, and a supply of straw and firewood was sent down beforehand to that place accordingly in a waggon from London, in compliance with the commanding officer's indent (W. O. Form, No. $\frac{2}{8}\frac{7}{3}\frac{1}{0}\frac{1}{-}\frac{1}{-}$). So far well; but when the battery reached Hounslow, the encamping ground was all under water from the recent heavy rains, and the commander determined, instead of passing the night on the swampy heath, to push on at once to Woolwich, where the battery arrived by nightfall after a fifty-mile march, and was much applauded by its comrades for the feat. This irregularity might have been condoned, but unfortunately the battery had left its forage behind, and a very pretty correspondence arose about it. The Money Branch proposed that the articles should be placed in store at Windsor—the nearest station—for reissue when required; but Burley and his people, who were always for reducing surplus stores, wanted to have it sold by auction; and the correspondence between the branches might be going on still, but that the Assistant-Controller, who was sent down to Hounslow to report on the case, brought back word that the articles were not forthcoming; the straw, it was supposed, had been blown away in a gale, while an old woman had been seen walking across the common with a bundle of sticks bearing a suspicious

resemblance to the firewood in question. And as a final result the gallant commandant (who was no other than my friend Cobbe Smith) would certainly have had to pay for the articles out of his own pocket if I had not come to the rescue. The matter was brought up for discussion at our weekly board meeting, when Lord Stowe appeared disposed to support Burley's view for enforcing the retrenchment, showing that both in the Domestic Department and the Pauper Commission they were always guided by precedent; but Bracton took my side, and said it would be an awkward case to defend if any questions should be asked about it in the House; and as Burley was not in Parliament we carried our point.

Although my action in this case was no doubt regarded by the office as evincing a dangerous laxity in the audit line, and to stamp me as a rash young man, still the victory over the S. G.'s was relished by my people, for hitherto the other side had been having it all their own way. In fact, my branch felt overmatched, and in consequence despondent; for what chance had they, when serving under an ignorant young fellow like myself, against the S. G. Branch headed by an experienced official like Burley, with an insatiable capacity for interfering with other people's business, and centralising all authority in himself? Sir Mordaunt Burley, after holding throughout his career a variety of small official

posts, more or less connected with looking after and giving trouble to other people, had first made his great reputation by his celebrated inquiry into the colonial military establishments, when he effected a great economy by selling off the guns and stores to be found all over the world, and organised a fine department, with a secretary, a registrar, five first and ten second class clerks, to check any purchases for the future. It is true this department collapsed immediately on his return home, and people were ill-natured enough to say that it cost more than the stores which had been sold; and Sir Mordaunt might have remained unemployed but for his celebrated series of letters to the *Dial*, asserting that at least five millions a-year might be retrenched in the military expenditure of the country by proper management. It was quite plain what that meant; and a man who could say this, and apparently was prepared to go on saying it an indefinite number of times, was evidently not of a sort to be left out in the cold; and accordingly the opportunity had been taken of a vacancy in our office to put a stop to the *Dial* correspondence, which threatened to become troublesome.

Against such a man, then, who, moreover, had several months' start, an untrained official was deemed to have no chance. The unequal nature of the struggle was indeed typified by the contrast between my empty table, and the piles of returns, reports, and

statements I found on Burley's when I paid him my visit on that first day. Yes, he had said on that occasion, it was indeed a great business, a very large task, and a very complicated work, looking as he spoke complacently round at the contents of his table, and the baskets and the boxes, all stuffed full of papers, which littered the floor; much in the same way as a chemical philosopher might show off his laboratory to an admiring but ignorant young lady, as if to say, "Wonderful, isn't it, that anybody should understand all about these things? Yet I do, although I won't attempt to explain them to you; they would be quite beyond your powers of apprehension."

Burley, then, was the man looked up to by the office generally, and the difference between us in general estimation was increased by my mode of setting to work. Although I had interfered in this particular case of Cobbe Smith's retrenchment, my usual practice was to avoid expressing any opinions on the papers that came before me, but, while requiring that everything should be sent up, contenting myself with reading them carefully, and seeking personal explanation on points not clear from the different clerks, and finally supporting the proposal put forward in each case for disposing of it by attaching my initials. And while I took this passive part, the experienced Burley was making play at a tremendous pace, sending out blank forms broadcast throughout

the army to be filled up, and calling for returns right and left. One in particular was considered a triumph of ingenuity,—a daily return of the market price of every kind of food and supplies at every station in the United Kingdom. These were laid on Burley's table every morning, and a staff of six extra clerks was sanctioned to overhaul them and strike an average. "The saving will cover the outlay over and over again," said Burley, when getting Lord Stowe to sanction the application to the Treasury for these clerks; "this plan will put all the local disbursers on the *qui vive* when they see how closely all their proceedings are watched. It is sure to prevent irregularities, and lead to economy. Why, it was only last week that we found out that the controller at Liffeytown was charging three-halfpence for eggs when they were being quoted for three-farthings at Brogeda. Think of the saving in this item only! Depend upon it, my lord, if you want economy, you must hold a firm grasp over things, and let men feel that they are looked after. And you can't have real control without having the accounts and returns on your own table, to check with your own eyes."

It was in this view that he organised his Movable Store Examination Branch, to which every storekeeper in the army sent up a weekly return, and no one was allowed to purchase stores until it was proved that the articles in demand could not be procured from some other station. This arrangement

led to a lively movement of dry goods about the country, pickaxes flowing from Pigtown to Paymouth, with a return ebb of barrack chairs and picketing chains, and other miscellaneous articles. The troops used to grumble at the delay in getting what they wanted, but the office did not mind that; and when our branch, now very mild and subdued, ventured to hint that the carriage of these stores up and down the kingdom must cost something, we were told that there was nothing so costly as keeping up stores that were not wanted. Moreover Burley wrote a minute suggesting that the duty of conveying these stores from one port to another might usefully be placed on the Navy, and proposing that before any of Her Majesty's ships left harbour, the captain should inquire of the local controller whether he had any stores to ship for the next port. In this way, said Burley, the cruising grounds of the Channel squadron might be made to conform to the interests of the public service, and an important reform effected without any charge to the State. However, the Admiralty sent us back such a letter that he did not press the point.

Meanwhile Burley was rather a popular fellow in the office, for all this work set a lot of promotion going. What with this new Daily Price Current Sub-Branch of six clerks, with young Meddell (a fellow of infinite persistence) at the head of it on a step of acting rank: four clerks extra for the Movable Store Examination Branch, put in charge of

McMuddell, an officer of long standing in the office, whose influence indeed pervaded every part of it; and seven clerks for the additional correspondence arising out of Burley generally, the S. Gs., who got the lion's share of these good things, had a fine time of it; while my branch, which heretofore had justly prided itself on receiving more letters than any other —that is, if you counted pay-sheets and muster-rolls among the letters—was now left altogether behind in the race, and felt, as I have said, proportionally depressed, having evidently no confidence in me, but looking to Burley as the real head of affairs.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DOMESTIC.

MEANWHILE, this close attention to official duty, however inadequate the result, involved a considerable change in the mode of home-life. Hitherto my Parliamentary engagements had not interfered with this, and our time had been passed much in the same way as that of all the other idle people in London. A young couple with enough to live on, especially if the wife is lady-like and pretty, and the husband a gentleman and an M.P., may soon have pretty much their choice of society, and as the season advanced we found ourselves floating on the tide of fashionable dissipation, the days and nights consumed in the stereotyped occupations which do duty for amusement, the mornings in trying to overtake the night's sleep lost; a sort of life fascinating enough at first, but unspeakably tedious as it went on. I confess, therefore, it was with a great sense of relief that I could now plead official engagements as an excuse for withdrawing from the varied monotony

of this perpetual racket. To be sure one had not to say very much in the House, but it was necessary to be there a great deal, especially for divisions, and at any rate it was impossible to go down to the War Office of a morning fresh for business if you had been up all the night standing about in stuffy drawing-rooms. So we withdrew to a certain extent from the gay world, my little wife being indeed more in need of rest than I was. The morning ride could still be generally managed, or, if I was kept away, Tom Strickland and one of his sisters would generally call to escort Eva and Sybil—for the latter had now joined us; while the necessity for making contingent appointments for meeting each other, whenever the ladies set off to go anywhere alone, added a zest to the business of life.

Another change made was that Eva should now take over the housekeeping, for so far the transfer of functions contemplated at the beginning of the season had not been carried out. I ought, no doubt, to have looked after the matter more closely, and helped my little wife in her first efforts, but somehow the time passed so quickly in engagements, real or fancied, that things had been allowed to take care of themselves; and attention was first called to the state of the case by a letter from St Leger & Gernell, the Leatherby bankers, apprising me that my account with them was considerably overdrawn. Whereupon I asked Eva for her cheque-book, which, how-

ever, did not throw much light on the matter, inasmuch as she had not filled up the counterfoils.

"My dear Eva, what is the use of keeping the cheque-book in this way? Here is ever so much money paid away, and no means of telling who it has gone to!"

Eva looked very sad over it. "I am very sorry," she said, "but I did not understand about this filling up the—this bit of paper that remains after you tear off the cheque. I thought it would not matter, so long as the money was properly paid; besides the people seemed quite satisfied."

"My dear Eva, you must have seen me making out cheques by the dozen, and might have learned by this time how it was done. However, I suppose you have got the receipts for all the payments, so we shall be able to find out in that way what has become of the money."

"I think I have, at any rate for most of them," Eva replied, and going to the writing-table, she turned out the contents of the drawer; notes, invitations, programmes of dances, a good many bills, and a few tradesmen's receipts. "Here is everything I have got," she said; "I always put everything about business into this drawer, so that I can find it again if I want it."

"And a very business-like arrangement it certainly is; but, my dear Eva, these receipts won't explain the overdrawing of the Leatherby account; my

balance at Gernell's was about three times as much as these come to. Are you sure you took receipts for all the bills you have paid?"

Eva thought she had, but was not quite clear on the subject, so there was nothing to be done but to await the banker's account showing to whom the cheques had been paid. The account however, when it came two days later, did not throw much light on the subject, for all the cheques were charged as paid to bearer, and so there was nothing to be done but to get Eva to guess out the items from the amounts. Nor did mere inspection of these figures help us greatly, for they were almost all for round sums, mostly twenty pounds.

"I confess I can't understand this account, Eva: surely the butcher's and baker's bills can't amount to exactly twenty pounds every month. There must be some mistake here. Come, Eva, look at this account, and try and recollect what it is all about."

Eva looked puzzled, and remained silent for some time, poring over the account. At last she brightened up.

"Of course! now I recollect all about it. I didn't give these cheques to the butcher or the baker, or these people. I gave them to cook, and she paid them. That's what it was."

"I think it would perhaps have been better if you had paid them yourself direct. However, provided they get their money all right it does not much

matter. But how about the receipts? Hasn't the cook made them over to you?"

"I don't think the tradespeople send in accounts on pieces of paper. They send in books. That is quite the regular plan, I know; Mrs Herries used to have her tradesmen's books—little dirty red books—and so has Mrs Lowder." And as this coincidence struck her, Eva looked quite happy.

"You are quite right, my love, only see that they sign for payments in their books, just as other people do on their bills. But, after all, this does not explain why the money should have been all in round numbers. We can't have eaten exactly twenty pounds' worth of meat every month, or exactly the same value in groceries."

"Why no, of course not. But, don't you see, I gave cook these cheques, and she paid the different people."

"And put the difference in her pocket?"

"No, Charlie; how absurd you are! She wanted money to pay for the things she got herself. You can't get everything from the grocer's, you know."

"What things?"

"Oh, really I can't remember at this moment; but she mentions a number of things she wants when she comes for orders—dusters, and pudding-cloths, and brandy for the puddings, and all sorts of things."

"But, even taking in this miscellaneous account

of the cook's, I still don't see why our expenditure should come out exactly at these round sums."

"Oh, how tiresome you are, Charlie! Of course I don't mean that. But cook says her account comes to so much, and that she wants some money to go on with, so I give her a cheque, and she keeps anything there is over till next time."

"Well, but does she furnish you with an account of these complicated transactions? are all these balances carried forward and brought on, and all these mysterious items for brandy, and pudding-cloths, and so forth?"

"She does not keep an account exactly, but she tells me all about it when she comes for orders; I can't say I can follow her a bit, she counts so fast: but I try to look wise as if I understood her, and I suppose it is all right."

I sent for the cook and asked to see the tradesmen's books, which, of course, were not then available, but would be sent for. About her own accounts it seemed useless to speak, as nothing could be inferred about them in the absence of the others. As I walked thoughtfully up and down the room, while Eva sat furtively watching me, I doubt not she fancied I was silently blaming her. In truth I blamed myself a great deal more for so inconsiderately placing this burden of housekeeping upon her, without giving any help or advice, or watching its progress as time went on. But I had always been

busy in a certain way, so far that every hour brought engagements or occupation of some sort, and as nothing had happened to call for notice, things had been allowed to take their course. And thus already our housekeeping had got into a mess, and the fault was mine, for I might have known exactly what would happen if it were left to my guileless little wife's unaided inexperience.

But clearly we must turn over a new leaf, for things could not go on for ever in this way. And prudence whispered the wisest course. Beauty, and grace, and amiability would not alone suffice for a perfect household. If we were to have a well-ordered home, my little wife must take her share of the family duties, and learn the ways of ordinary prudent housekeeping. So young as she is, so easily moulded her pliant disposition, these habits should not be difficult to acquire. Clearly, then, the proper course is to help her in this matter, till she can run alone; to do things for her till she can do them for herself. This is what I ought to have done during the winter at Leatherby, instead of taking all the work myself to save Eva trouble, putting off the evil day. However, there ought to be no more procrastination. It would be a terrible nuisance, no doubt, especially just now when I was just putting on official harness, but the trouble would lessen daily as Eva came to understand these things, and there was no reason why in a year or two she should

not be able to manage just as well as other housekeepers.

Such were the promptings of prudence while I paced the room after the cook's retreat to the lower regions. But the prospect of spending an hour a-day over small housekeeping details seemed unutterably dismal, while pseudo-conscience whispered a caution against giving up so much time to petty private business. Better do one thing properly than attempt perfection all round. The office needed all my time, if business there was ever to be mastered. What are a few pounds saved in small household economies if saved at a sacrifice of the great work in hand? This specious reasoning prevailed, and the upshot was an arrangement come to that Eva should not be bothered with accounts at all, but should bring all her bills to me, and I would discharge them. But neither of us was really satisfied at heart with the plan. I knew that I was thus encouraging her besetting infirmity, and that we were making a false step at the threshold of our married life. She too had, in more or less dim sort, a sense of duty evaded —of her scheme of life being incomplete. But if I was weak enough to take the way that promised most present ease, what more natural than that she should wish to follow it? Yet as I walked down to the office I was oppressed with a conscious feeling that we had taken another step towards two separate paths in life, while in the due avoidance which

henceforth occurred of all talk about household business, might be traced the origin of that feeling of reserve on her part which now and again began to manifest itself.

Needs not be said that the new scheme really came to nought. A busy official, who tries to combine a life of work with one of pleasure, with all its engagements and distractions, every hour engaged in some way or other, never does find time to look after his private business, much less his wife's; and beyond drawing cheques when Eva came with bills, and occasionally looking at my banker's book, the squaring of accounts, including those of the cook, was indefinitely deferred; how many bills remained unpaid I did not inquire.

Eventually the cook's case was disposed of in another way. It was on the occasion of an eventful dinner-party. Our little dinner-parties, indeed, were not uniformly successful; for, owing perhaps to my own irregularity of hours induced by Parliamentary life, the household had already got somehow out of gear, and dinner could seldom be depended upon within an hour of the appointed time; while Eva, on my remonstrating, said cook looked at her so strangely she was afraid to go down to the kitchen and find fault. I, too, felt ashamed to make a fuss, being so often unpunctual myself; besides, it would be inexcusable to be out of temper when both Sybil and Eva were ready to sit with imperturbable patience in the

drawing-room, divinely dressed, for any length of time, as if dinner were a matter of supreme indifference; ready indeed, if it was an opera night, to start off when the carriage came round without waiting for dinner at all. If these two fragile creatures could do without food, it would be disgraceful in me, a strong man and a soldier, to be put out by such a trifling matter; and except that occasionally a dish or two ordered did not make its appearance at all, being reported to be spoiled, the cook, when she did send the dinner up, generally sent it up well.

A rather absurd incident occurred about this time. It had been arranged that we should give two small dinner-parties each of eight persons on succeeding days. Coming home rather late on the first evening, I hurried up-stairs to dress, and was descending to the drawing-room when the servant stopped me on the landing to say that there were fifteen ladies and gentlemen in the drawing-room, including Miss Barton. Well, why should there not be? I asked, forgetting for the moment the details of the programme. Because (if I pleased) mistress had ordered the table to be laid for eight, and everything had been got ready accordingly. Then what had happened became clear. However, under the circumstances, there was nothing to be done but to tell the man to lengthen the table as quickly as possible, and entering the drawing-room to endeavour to amuse the company till dinner was announced, which event

happened about fifty minutes after the proper time. The bill of fare proved of course somewhat inadequate, and the attendance also; but when I explained to those near me that, in fact, we had expected to have the pleasure of seeing them by instalments, but that there had evidently been a mistake in the date of the invitations, the explanation was received very good-humouredly by everybody except old Lady Grampus, who evidently considered that an affront had been put upon her, and was disposed to sniff throughout the evening, more especially when she learnt what was the nature of Mr Herries' profession, for he and his wife were among those who came on the wrong day. At the other end of the table they appeared to get on wonderfully well under the circumstances, owing probably to the presence of Tom Strickland, who was a capital talker, although Eva was dimly conscious that something had gone wrong. When we came to discuss the matter later in the evening, after every one had left, Eva was sure that she had named the right days. At any rate, I had not the heart to scold her.

The other misadventure, which led to the cook's retirement above referred to, was a more serious one. There was again a small party impending, when coming home a few minutes before the dinner-hour I was kept waiting some time at the door, neither knocker nor bell producing any response, till bethinking me that I had the latch-key in my pocket I let

myself in. Eva was in the drawing-room looking excited and anxious. "Oh, Charlie!" she cried, "I am so glad you have come back—cook's in a fit. She looked very strange in the afternoon when I went into the kitchen, and didn't seem to understand what was said to her, and just now Annette came running up to say that she had fallen down in a fit. Poor thing, it seems so dreadful! what is to be done?"

Such was the account delivered in broken accents as we descended to the lower regions, Barrett the man, it was explained, having gone to fetch a doctor.

The scene in the kitchen was certainly enough to alarm a young housekeeper, especially on the eve of a dinner-party. The table was covered with the litter incidental to the occasion: on one side stood the respectable widow who had been engaged temporarily during a vacancy in the scullery department, holding on to a chair and staring us gravely in the face; on the other was Annette, Eva's maid, whom we had brought from Leatherby, gazing horror-stricken at the stout figure of the cook, who lay recumbent as regards her legs and body, her head and shoulders supported by the dresser, breathing stertorously, the silence broken only by the click of the jack, which bore a saddle of mutton pursuing its mechanical rotation in neglect before the fire.

The nature of the situation was of course readily

apprehended, even without the clue afforded by the spirituous vapour which pervaded the place. The widow lady, indeed, when appealed to, declined to afford explanation. Her mouth opened several times, as if about to give utterance, but apparently she thought better of it, and continued to regard us with a smiling stare, looking like a seedy waxwork figure, and holding on steadily by the chair. The cook was past explanation. On being shaken she opened her eyes, but speedily relapsed into slumber.

"No doubt about it," I remarked, rising from the kneeling position in which I had conducted my diagnosis of the case. "The woman's dead——"

"Dead!" cried Eva.

"Dead drunk, I was going to say, my dear, if you had allowed me to finish my sentence."

The situation was sufficiently absurd, albeit disgusting into the bargain. The widow was sufficiently composed to be guided, with Barrett's help when he returned with the doctor (whose aid we did not require) to the door, whence having been assisted down the steps, still smiling fixedly, we left her to pursue her way homeward, an operation which she effected slowly by means of the area-railings, although apparently much embarrassed by the frequent gaps in their friendly support. The worthy soul in the excitement of parting forgot her little basket, which we afterwards found in a corner covered with a rusty black apron, containing selected

samples of the bill of fare for the day in the form of salmon, lamb-cutlets, fruit and vegetables, with a packet of tea and about a pound of butter thrown in by way of make-weight. The cook was not so easily disposed of, but Barrett and I dragged her into the scullery, where she was left to pursue her slumbers in peace. I could not help thinking at the time that if old Burley had chanced to see me thus engaged, he would have considered it a moral triumph ever afterwards, and that I should not like to have been discovered even by little Roundhand, my private secretary, who was coming to dinner. Meanwhile it was too late to send notice to our guests, and all that could be done was for Barrett to tell the coachman as each carriage drove up, that the party was unavoidably put off through sudden sickness in the household; while Eva, by writing by that night's post to each guest to say the sick person was the cook, anticipated the fire of anxious inquiries next morning. Let me conclude this episode by adding that the cook took herself off next morning before anybody else was up, and was never heard of again, when, as may be supposed, all the tradesmen came to say that they had never been paid anything; and certainly their books were innocent of receipts. Of course the delinquent might have been found if I had set the police to work, and prosecuted into the bargain; but all this would have involved trouble and time, to say nothing of publicity. I did

not fancy the notion of Eva being cross-examined in the witness box upon her method of household management, and after all it might have been difficult to prove the payment of the cheques to the retiring official; so, like many another of my fellow-British subjects, I shirked my duty as a citizen, paid the bills, and let the matter drop. Looking over the books cursorily, it appeared that Eva and myself must have consumed on the average about three pounds of butcher's meat and a couple of quarts of milk daily, and that Sybil's appetite was equally healthy.

Eva was greatly discomposed by this incident, and very disheartened and depressed in spirits about it for some days; but the real blame I knew was mine, for placing on her all at once a burden greater than she could bear.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE OFFICE FINDS SOMETHING TO DO.

MEANWHILE official matters went on pretty much as usual. General politics became interesting towards the end of the session, it being a nice question, and hotly debated in the press and the clubs and over London dinner-tables, whether we (the Government) should pull through the session. The general impression seemed to be that we should not, or that if we did our longer stay of office would be due to the forbearance of the Opposition, or, to speak more strictly, to their indifference or disinclination to succeed us, the fact being that parties and opinions had now got mixed up together in miscellaneous fashion, and that the Opposition had no specific principle on hand on which to build up a definite platform. But things being in this state the time was not very propitious for raising any great army questions. The policy of the Government was clearly to avoid big subjects which the Opposition might take hold of, and so the various muddy elements

which had been stirred up during previous sessions were now allowed to sink to the bottom of the administrative river, leaving a clear stream of routine to run undisturbed above. And Lord Stowe was quite the man for the occasion. He made indeed a speech in the House of Lords in regular bow-wow style, about the great importance of the department committed to his care, and the anxious consideration he was giving to the subject of the best mode of following out the path of army reform entered upon by his predecessor, Mr Thorowcome, the loss of whose services to the country at this juncture could hardly be over-estimated; how, finally, he must claim the indulgence of their lordships and the country during the time necessary for making himself thoroughly familiar with the various details of this great branch of the Administration. Listening to this speech, I thought that the looked-for opportunity was about to come at last. Here were the hour and the man. I should now have my coveted chance of pulling the administrative wires. But looking at Bracton, who was sitting beside me on the steps of the throne, I noticed that this experienced official was smiling sarcastically with his tongue in his cheek, while an expression escaped him in undertone which sounded very much like "darned old humbug." And I confess that my heart sank within me when our chief, in reply to the question of a noble lord on Opposition benches, said that the Government, in consideration

of the great expense attending them, estimated by that distinguished official, Sir Mordaunt Burley, to amount to £57,666, 14s. 3d., and considering also that great experience had already been acquired by the troops from the outlay on previous occasions, did not propose to carry out any autumnal manœuvres during the present year.

This was the first intimation we understrappers had been given on the subject, although Bracton whispered to me that he had guessed as much. But the Government in throwing out this sop to the economists, miscalculated the extent of public feeling on the subject. Interest in army affairs generally might have died away, but people had got to look on autumnal manœuvres as an institution, and such an outcry was raised by the press of both parties, the *Dial* taking the lead, that Bracton very soon received instructions to announce in the Commons that it was determined to carry them out, and that the great open country of Arrowdown in Yewcestershire had been selected for the scene of operations.

Then began a scene of wild energy in our establishment in Pall Mall. Weeks before the time appointed for the mimic campaign, while the troops were resting peacefully in their quarters, all unconscious of the interest being taken on their behalf, while all the generals and staff officers in the kingdom still remained in anxious expectancy whether or not they should be selected for commands, we in Pall Mall

were hard at work, reporting, minuting, telegraphing, estimating, doing everybody else's work in fact, and our own a great many times over. Burley especially was in his element. Having learnt that the Quarter-master-General's office had sent down some staff officers to survey the ground, Burley thereupon despatched a full Controller and three assistants to the scene of action to report on the resources of the district, and the best mode of procuring supplies; and when the simple people of those remote parts saw this second body of officers careering in handsome uniforms over the country, they were quite puzzled to know which of the two were the "real soldiers," being finally disposed, however, to give the preference to the controllers, who came out much the stronger of the two in the way of caparisoned chargers and servants.

Next came the question how the supplies were to be furnished. Some one in the office ventured to suggest that it might not be a bad plan to allow the local staff to purchase the required supplies on the spot. Yewcestershire contained over half a million of people, so that although Arrowdown was a rather wild spot there ought not to be much difficulty in feeding the extra twenty thousand or so who would be there on the occasion. But Burley was down at once sharply on this officious person, and proved to demonstration in a minute of forty-seven paragraphs, with an appendix of several pages of tabular figures,

collected from his Daily Price Current Reports, and to compile which four extra clerks had been sanctioned for three weeks at eight-and-sixpence per diem—charge debited to vote 17 of the army estimates, "Head, Movement of Troops—Subhead, Miscellaneous;" he showed conclusively, I say, from this array of facts and figures, that meat could be laid down on the Yewcestershire uplands by contract from London at 3.746 farthings a pound cheaper than it could be bought at Stampton market, whereby a saving would accrue during the manœuvres of £1152, 8s. $6\frac{3}{140}$d. He might have added that there would be a still further saving by dispensing with the manœuvres altogether.

It was only natural that my people—the P. G. Branch—should feel rather disgusted at being left out of all the fun, for we had neither uniforms nor chargers among us, and no excuse for interfering. Rueteen, the head clerk, suggested that we should not be doing our duty if we did not do something also, and urged that this was a case clearly contemplated by the warrant—clause about considering the matter from a financial point of view, &c.—and that we ought at least to send down a couple of clerks to watch proceedings; but the proposal fell through.

Meanwhile the other side—by which I mean the S. G. Branch—were making great play. The contracts for the food and forage required during the manœuvres were all completed, and a really beautiful

scheme laid down for their distribution. A large chart was first prepared (compiled from the Ordnance Survey, three intelligent young Engineer officers being brought into the office for the purpose), with all the railway lines laid down, and little coloured squares filled in at the different junctions through which the troops were to pass on their way to the manœuvres, blue representing mutton; brown, bread; yellow, corn; and so on. The contractor had a copy of this, the original being kept on Burley's table. The object of the chart will be at once apparent. A few hours before the troops were due to arrive, say at Yewcester, the local control officer would telegraph to the office in Pall Mall, the office would telegraph to the contractor, and the contractor would send off the supplies by the next train, so that, as Burley said, rubbing his hands—as he explained the nature of the map to Lord Stowe, who had invited all the heads of departments to come into his room to look at it—"so that the troops will get their bread hot and hot, and their meat fresh and fresh, and the department can thus keep a real, an active, an effective control, my lord, over this important branch of the public expenditure."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FIRST EFFORT WITH THE NEW BROOM.

THE time seemed now to have come for a first attempt to enter upon the task which I had been bold enough to propose to myself. By dint of careful attention and application I had pretty well mastered the secrets of departmental routine, without which it would be hopeless to attempt the initiation of changes. A man may administer an office well by sheer force of ability, without diving deep into things; but to carry out changes of system, a knowledge of details is absolutely essential. All successful administrators, Pitt, Peel, Napoleon, Wellington—not to mention our own Mr Merrifield—have been conspicuous for their mastery of details. In every great department the obstruction to reform does not come from any factious opposition; it arises partly from the vanity which resists any change which strikes at men's self-importance, but still more, because men who spend their lives in the performance of routine business become unable at last to see beyond it; they get to

regard it as the end instead of the means. This was emphatically what had happened in our Pall Mall establishment, where many of our most respected members had really got to look upon the army as a mere appendage to the office, kept up in order to furnish it with occupation. But these men of routine are great in details, and to overcome their powers of passive obstruction you must be able to beat them at their own weapons. This then had been my first aim; and while my branch had come to regard me as a harmless creature, though, perhaps, a trifle inquisitive, I was gradually acquiring a knowledge of the mysteries of routine in all its branches. And the best proof of the success of my labours was, that I could now predict with almost certainty, what would be the fate of any paper that came into the office; what, for example, would be the nature of the objections raised upon a contingent bill; in what cases the office would discover that some new additional certificate was necessary which had never before been prescribed in any known regulation; under what circumstances a general could issue an extra ration without first telegraphing up to us for sanction; what would be the conditions that might justify a distant commanding engineer in driving in a nail on his own authority, and what those that would involve the deputation of a young officer from our establishment to tell him how to do it; how many different forms a battery officer making a requisition for repairs to his carriages would

have to send in before he hit upon the right one; how many paragraphs Burley would put into a report;—upon these, and a variety of similar interesting problems, I used to exercise my ingenuity, and it was gratifying to observe how accurate my diagnosis had become. It was quite a new sort of inductive philosophy.

But further, as administrative arrangements are greatly mixed up with matters of account, it was necessary to get an acquaintance with the mysteries of book-keeping. Not liking to make known my wishes to any one in the office, where the notion of the head of a department—especially a Parliamentary head—wanting to understand details of that sort would have been regarded as a piece of eccentric curiosity unsupported by any precedent, I got Mr Paterson's book-keeper to give me private lessons of an evening; and as soon as his knowledge of the subject was exhausted, I engaged the assistant-cashier of my former office, the Metropolitan and Provincial Bank, to teach me banking accounts, finishing up with the instruction of a young man from Counterpain, Batt, Crow, & Co., the well-known public accountants. Many a long evening was spent thus profitably in the back parlour of the house by Queen's Gate, while Eva and Sybil were out at parties, and I more than once got wigged by Glissereene (the Government whip) for being absent when possible divisions were impending; but I was rewarded in the end when,

under the light of these studies, the mysteries of military accounts became unfolded. It was not much to make the discovery that I understood them as well as Mr Awedittе, the Reviewer-General, for I had always held a shrewd suspicion that, like most of the heads of departments, my respected deputy did not know much about these things; but it was something to feel a match for all the ledger-keepers and journal-writers who occupied a rabbit-warren of rooms under my control. Still more gratifying was it to have a clear perception of the beauty of the system; how the whole aim and end of it seemed to be to work up to the Parliamentary grants and obtain vouchers; and how, accordingly, while nobody could spend twopence-halfpenny in any part of the British empire without proving that he had done so to our satisfaction, by sending up a receipt for the item to our office, the accounts presented to Parliament did not bring out the final cost of any one item of expenditure whatsoever, from a regiment down to a rifle.

Thus fortified, the moment seemed to have come for a first step. The interest of the country in army affairs generally had died away for the time, or possibly the apparent inertness of the new official might have been noticed. As it was, the *Overseer* remarked one Saturday, *apropos* of something military, that the atmosphere of office appeared to have had its usual effect in my case. Since Captain West became Paymaster-General to the Forces, it was observed in a

smart little paragraph, there had been no more of his lively speculations on military policy. If the Government wanted to gag this promising young member, they had certainly succeeded. It was time then to give up seeming to slumber, and these coming manœuvres appeared to furnish a good lever for the first effort. Accordingly, I determined to seek out Lord Stowe, and unburden myself of my ideas on the subject.

I found the Secretary of State engaged apparently in answering private notes, as was generally the case when I went into his room. I at once plunged into the subject.

"Lord Stowe, I have been thinking a good deal over our present way of carrying on the business of the army, and it seems to me that there is room at least for consideration whether the system may not be improved. I should be glad to be allowed to speak to you on the matter—that is, if I am not interrupting you?"

"Oh, not in the least; I am always ready of course to discuss these things with you," and Lord Stowe, looking rather bored, glanced at the sheet of notepaper before him—at which I too, I grieve to confess, involuntarily glancing, could not help recognising the words, "My dear Sophia," and recollecting therefrom that one of his lordship's daughters bore that name. "Not at all," said my chief, "business is business;" and so saying Lord Stowe gave up his

note altogether, and turned round in his chair to listen, his face bearing a beautiful aspect of resignation.

"This War Office is a very big concern."

"It is indeed; I should say it is the heaviest department of the whole; nearly a thousand letters come in every day, I am told. But the Home Office is a heavy office too; there is not so much work coming in and going out, but some of the cases they get are very big, and then you see the office is much smaller; here the establishment is very large."

"And not only very large, but our business is very complicated. It is not always easy to know how a case should be dealt with when it does come. I know that it took me some weeks of hard work merely to get to the bottom of the routine."

"Well," replied Lord Stowe, smiling as if he were going to say a good thing, "I confess I have not got to the bottom of it yet, but then, you see, I only deal with the part that finds its way up to the top. And I must say the cases are put before me in very good form. I am not quite sure that we might not introduce the Board of Commerce method of docketing. They do things very well at the Board; but after all this is a very big affair, as you truly observe, and it is ticklish work touching any part of a complicated machine."

"It is a complicated machine indeed, and wants a lot of oil constantly poured on it to keep it running

smoothly. And it would not take much, I suspect, to throw it out of gear."

"Very true, but then we have a very able staff of officials to keep the thing going, and admirably they do their work. When I was in the Commons I never lost an opportunity of saying how admirably the public business was carried on by the permanent civil service, and how, in fact, but for them, it could not be carried on for a day."

"I don't want for a moment to be thought to disparage the permanent civil service, but what has impressed me very strongly is the fact that all this press of business and this enormous establishment are kept agoing merely to look after a little bit of an army. If we are to receive and send out a thousand letters a-day with a hundred thousand men, and that in peace time, where would be the limits of our business supposing we had to put half a million into the field? Why, all Pall Mall would not hold us."

"But then that is a case that will never arise. If one principle of English policy is more clear than another, it is that we shall never attempt to compete with Continental powers in respect of their great military establishments. An English army must necessarily be a small one. England, if she engages in military operations on the Continent, must operate with allies. This has always been her policy, and always will be." And, saying this, Lord Stowe

leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs as if he thought he rather resembled Mr Pitt.

"At any rate," I replied, "we act as if these were our principles. If the French or the Austrians, not to say the Germans, were to handle their half-million of soldiers in the way we deal with our little force, their administration would collapse at once. But apart from the question of numbers, I would ask whether, if we barely get along with all this pother in peace time, with this enormous office and our thousand letters a-day, what would happen to us if we had to go to war? It seems to me that, no matter how small the army might be, our department would utterly break down."

"Well, but, as to that, I suppose if we had to go to war, matters would be carried on somewhat differently. It is hardly fair to criticise a peace system by assuming a totally different state of things. No doubt in such a case our system of administration would undergo the needful modification to suit the altered conditions."

"And before we had carried out this change there would be another Crimean break-down. No, not another, it would be something twenty times worse. Then you were merely unprepared, and a system had to be created, but there was at any rate nothing to pull down. But now the first step needed would be to get rid of the monstrous incubus we have been building up all these years. There would be found, I

fear, a force of obstructiveness, and interference, and over-centralisation, about this overgrown department, sufficient to drag down the finest army and the best general England ever produced. I declare, my lord, when I think of our hopeless incompetence to undertake a war under our present system; the inevitable disaster that would follow an attempt to do so, with our cumbersome over-centralisation, our multiplication of checks upon checks, and wheels upon wheels, with all the loss of power and the friction they produce; when I think of this and of the disgrace that must happen, if we are put to the trial, the rage of the nation that would burst forth, and the execration that would be poured on the heads of those who are responsible, I declare my anxiety becomes positive torture sometimes when thinking of these things. It seems as if we were living on the edge of a mine, awaiting an explosion that must come sooner or later."

Lord Stowe seemed rather taken aback for a moment at this outburst, but quickly recovered himself.

"My dear West," he said, after a short pause, "you draw a very alarming picture, but I don't think things are really so bad as all that, although I daresay there is a great deal of force in what you say. Still, if we were in such an unsatisfactory state, people would have found it out long before this."

"You can soon find out the fact for yourself, Lord Stowe, if you go into the matter."

"Well, I don't profess to have that knowledge of details which you military men possess, but I don't speak of what I know myself. Look at other people —look at the public generally, and the army itself. They all seem pretty satisfied with the present state of things."

"I suppose the public generally think that it is not their business to consider these things, but the business of the people who are paid to look after them. As for the army, you would not think it viewed the present system with complacency if you knew it as well as I do. The army does not swear as it used to do in Flanders—that would be thought bad manners nowadays; but it expresses itself very forcibly about our department, I can assure you. But it feels, and feels truly, that there is no good making a row; the reform must come from within if it is to be successful."

"But you speak as if there were no military men in the office, whereas there are plenty, and they all seem perfectly satisfied with the present state of things. Take Burley, for instance; he is a general officer, and a man of great experience, yet he does not share your alarmist views."

"Burley is no doubt a General and a K.C.B., and all the rest of it, but he has not done any military duty, I believe, for the last thirty years. His life seems to have gone in compiling blue-books and taking out averages. Besides, it strikes me that

most of these people have had such long terms of office duty that they have come to look at things with official eyes. That is why I trouble you so soon. I wish to speak from first impressions, before I too fall under the spell of office."

Lord Stowe looked particularly sagacious as, after a pause, he replied, that while it was very gratifying to perceive my zeal in the public service, and he was deeply interested in what I said, yet I could hardly be aware what a reform of this kind meant. It must be made a Cabinet question to begin with; and he doubted if Mr Merrifield would go into the thing, for he hated military matters. Yet without his active aid nothing could be done. Better therefore let things be. There was no chance of doing anything in our time. Our Government was not strong, and we had quite enough of difficulties about us as it was, without creating fresh ones. Let us hope the necessity for undertaking military operations would not arise in our day.

Such was the substance of what the Minister said, and while he said it I saw that I had gone too far; for he gave me the impression of a man who suddenly found that he was shut up in the same room with a dangerous lunatic, and was talking to humour him. And indeed when I looked at Lord Stowe, as he turned round on his chair to face me, his feet on a stool, displaying neat shoe-strings and comfortable woollen socks, with the ends of his drawers coming

down over them, his cool waistcoat, spruce necktie, ample shirt-collar, and light hair, tinged with grey, brushed well up over his forehead, the picture altogether of a respectable elderly commonplace official, the absurdity of associating any grand scheme of army reform with such a presence presented itself very vividly to my mind.

The silence remained unbroken for a few moments, during which the question occurred to me, what would be the state of things in case of an invasion, or supposing an army had to be sent on some foreign expedition? I pictured to myself Lord Stowe on horseback at Tilbury receiving an invasion at the head of the troops, or Lord Stowe in his cabinet dictating comprehensive instructions for embarking an army. And I thought that if a hundred thousand men, or fifty, or even ten thousand, had to be sent, say to Belgium, what chance would they have of getting there under the auspices of my venerable friend? I could not help thinking too of the turmoil that the departure of these ten thousand would create; the telegrams that would come and go; how our letters received would mount up to two thousand a-day, to the distraction of the registry branch and the pride of the office; of the orders and counter-orders that would issue; of the extra clerks that would be entertained; of the banging of doors and running in and out of *commissionaires* that would go on; of the minutes that Burley would

write in a perfectly illegible hand; how, finally, the ten thousand men would probably arrive in Belgium without anything to eat, and having left their ammunition behind them; how the noble lord would sit there, cool and comfortable, in his office, as now, writing notes to his dear Sophia, and believing that he was pulling the wires in approved departmental fashion, until awakened by the outbursting of national indignation that would follow our disasters; of the royal commissions and committees that would sit, and the interminable evidence that would be taken, all tending to show that nobody in particular was to blame; how at last the country would set about building up a new system which would take another twenty years to collapse in its turn.

Such ideas crossed each other in my mind as we sat in that cool room looking out on the gardens, the blind drawn down to keep out the glare, the silence broken only by the gentle murmur of movement in the corridors, and the rumble of an occasional carriage along the road below. Meanwhile Lord Stowe glanced down at his unfinished note, and then looked at me, as much as to say that he hoped I was going away.

Mingled with my feeling of vexation at having so mismanaged my case and miscalculated the nature of the man I had to deal with, was a sense of the absurdity of the situation. But I determined to make another effort.

"Excuse my detaining you so long, Lord Stowe; but there is still one point I want to mention. These autumn manœuvres. They give the office a tremendous lot of extra work."

"They do indeed, and cut into our holidays terribly. I was just writing to my girls, who are in Switzerland, to tell them I saw no chance of joining them till quite late in the autumn."

"Still, apart from any probability of war, I suppose it is intended the camp of exercise should be made, so far as possible, a practical school of training for the troops?"

"Certainly; and I have always been given to understand that their effect is highly beneficial." And Lord Stowe spoke a little petulantly, as much as to say, how many mare-nests is this officious young person going to discover?

"Would it not be desirable then to carry on the affair as much as possible after the fashion of real campaigning?"

"That is precisely what I am given to understand is done. The troops live in tents, and have their outpost duty, and marching, and so forth, just as in real war—everything except the actual fighting."

"Has your lordship seen Sir Mordaunt Burley's beef and bread map?"

"You mean his chart for the distribution of provisions? Yes; it seems to me very clear and ingenious."

"Yes; but then is it to be supposed for a moment

that troops could be fed on active service by supplies shot down in this way from London, when the smallest mistake, such as the miscarriage of a telegram, may make everything go wrong? Besides, what sort of training is it for the generals and staff to be kept in leading-strings in this way, and fed like helpless children?"

"Well, but you are objecting to what I am given to understand is a fundamental principle of organisation—namely, the separation of the duties of supply from those of commanding the troops."

"I doubt if the Duke of Wellington acted on that fundamental principle, when he fed and fought his army in Spain. But now, I would venture to make a suggestion. There is a vote of fifty and some odd thousand pounds taken for these manœuvres. Why not make over the money to the general commanding, and let him make his own arrangements for feeding the troops? Then this camp would be something like a real training school."

Lord Stowe said he hardly knew what to think of this. At any rate, he should like to talk it over with some of the heads of departments. He would see me again about it some other day. Just now, he feared he could not pursue the subject. It was actually half-past three, and there was a Cabinet Council at four; but he was really very much obliged for what I had said, and hoped to have a great deal more conversation with me on the subject.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH HERCULES DOES NOT SWEEP OUT THE STABLE.

Bowed out in this way I felt baffled, and a feeling of depression came over me as I now became sensible of the apparent hopelessness of the task. To move this great machine needed evidently a great effort of will in the highest places, and the idea I had in my ingenuousness confided to Herries of setting the machine going properly merely by pulling the wires, was clearly a vain one. There is little use in pulling wires which have no spring at the end of them.

In my despair I sought out Bracton, and confided my sorrow to him.

Bracton was a very different sort of man from Lord Stowe, but I cannot say he gave me much more cause for comfort.

"I have no doubt all you say is quite true," he observed, although I could trace a tinge of scepticism in his voice, implying that he suspected me of a taint

of junkerism; "from what I can see, there's an awful waste of red tape in this shop, and three times too many fingers at work on it; but it's no good entering on a grand scheme of reform with old Stowe at the top of the office. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," continued Bracton, who usually expressed himself in homely idiomatic fashion. "Anybody who knows what Lord Wraymouth has been for the last twenty years, knows what to expect of Lord Stowe. That cock won't fight, you may depend. The fact is, if he hadn't come into his title and twenty thousand a-year, he wouldn't be in the Cabinet at all."

"But Lord Stowe need not stay here for ever?"

"He will stay in as long as we do, I suspect. I feel very much with you; that is, I can see very plainly that there is great room for simplifying, that there is too much meddling, and doing other people's work for them. But then, where's the time to come from for setting things right? It's about even that we shan't pull through this session."

"But wouldn't army reform be a good card to play, and help to strengthen the Government just now?"

"I doubt it. The country is getting to be tired of the subject. Besides, Merrifield has a lot of things on his hands just now, and won't thank you for weighting him still more——"

"Well, but if Merrifield is the economist he professes to be, he ought to be very glad of any honest

chance to save public money. And there is plenty of room for saving here."

"Yes, but think what a hornet's nest you bring about you if you propose reductions in the department. No, if you go in for the cutting down lay, begin with the outsiders who haven't got any friends. And after all, West, I am bound to say that although you soldiers are always talking about this office being overgrown, other people say just the same about the army; that there are too many officers and too many generals, too many everything, except the rank and file."

"There is plenty of room for manipulation in that direction, I admit. Dear me, if Pendragon and those fellows who go about stumping the country on the army reform question knew all that I and other military men know, they would have made a sensation and no mistake, and produced some results before this. But there is no good tinkering here and there, while this Augean stable remains unswept. I should like to see reforms begin with the parts that need them most."

"If you take my advice you will begin with the parts that take least trouble."

With this our conversation ended, leaving it pretty evident that there was not much help to be looked for from Mr Bracton.

The promised meeting for discussing my proposals duly came off, after sundry reminders administered

to our chief. That astute statesman took the chair, sitting at the top of the large table kept for such purposes in his room, and Bracton, Burley, Mr Tregarth, and myself were of course present; but I was surprised to find that Mr Awedittе, the Reviewer-General, an officer nominally subordinate to my branch, was invited to be of the party, and also Mr Lougher Wrythem, who was only a clerk; but Burley whispered to me that the former's great familiarity with military details of all kinds entitled him to share in discussions of this sort, and that Mr Lougher Wrythem was great at actuarial calculations, which might very likely be needed. It struck me that the opinions of one or two experienced officers might be more useful than actuarial calculations in a matter of this sort, and as I was the only military man present except Burley, who was only a nominal soldier, I suggested that it might be well to ask the chief of the staff to join us; but Burley objected that this was to be a discussion on an important financial principle in which the military part of the department could not properly have a voice.

"Now then," said Lord Stowe blandly when we were seated, "perhaps Captain West will favour us with the suggestions he is desirous of bringing under the consideration of the department."

Thus called upon, I made my proposal, namely, that the grant for the manœuvres of the year should be made over to the generals commanding the two

sides, to be laid out by their staff in feeding and moving the troops on their responsibility. This would give them experience in one of the most difficult parts of military duty. The work of the camp would then really resemble closely what has to be done on active service, with this difference, however, that whereas in the latter case the general's power to spend money is practically uncontrolled, he would here be limited strictly by the grant. The value of this sort of training to the military as well as the local civil staff, I urged, could hardly be overestimated.

There was a pause after my little speech, while Lord Stowe looked round the table as much as to say: you have heard what this lunatic proposes, gentlemen; now will some one put a strait-waistcoat on him?

Mr Awedittе was the first to speak, which he did with a deprecating smile and manner, such as a nurse might use with a wilful child which must be treated with kindness, although it cannot be made to understand the reasons why it cannot have what it wants. Perhaps he might be allowed to explain that what Captain West proposed was not in fact practicable, because in that case the expenditure would not follow the course of the Parliamentary votes. The vote for the manœuvres did not include the ordinary expenses for feeding the troops, and so forth, but only the extraordinary expenses.

"Exactly so," broke in Burley, "vote P, page 154, item 19;" whereon Lord Stowe, who, like all of us, had a copy of the army estimates before him, hunted up the item with his double eyeglass, and having found it bowed towards Burley and looked round the table, as much as to say there was no doubt about the fact, and that it certainly told very much against me.

Mr Aweditte went on. Very good. Then, he submitted, it was quite evident the Paymaster-General's proposal would be impracticable. Further it would involve a complete alteration in the mode of conducting the issue of funds for the army, in fact of the very duties performed by his (the Paymaster-General's) own office as prescribed in the Act of Parliament and the Warrant.

I replied that of course alterations involved that something should be altered. It was not necessary to make a long speech to explain that. It was precisely an alteration, and a very radical one, that I was aiming at.

Then Mr Lougher Wrythem broke in, also in deprecating fashion, for a Parliamentary official (especially if he can speak without stammering) is a man to be treated with a certain degree of deference, even although he be young and foolish. Might he (Mr Wrythem) venture to hint that the Paymaster-General's scheme would be in violation of the cardinal principle, that the army expenditure should be subject to civil control? If there was one principle

more firmly established than another it was this, and he might venture to say it was one to override which would be fraught with the gravest consequences.

"But who wants to override it?" I replied. "Admitting the principle to the fullest extent, although, by the way, you have not stated it fully, for the principle is not so much that all military matters shall be controlled by this office, as that all military matters, including this office and everything else connected with the army, shall be subject to the control of Parliament; but letting that pass, I fail to see how my scheme interferes with any principle, or at least any sound one. It certainly aims at cutting down this over-centralisation which is the bane of our present system, but it leaves the control of the Secretary of State over the estimates every bit as complete and undisputed as before."

"How can that be," asked Burley, "if you take away the supervision of the expenditure from the department, and vest it in persons at the other end of the kingdom?"

"But the final control would still rest with the Secretary of State just as much in the one case as the other. No one supposes that the Secretary of State issues the money and checks off the expenditure of the department in person. He does all this through subordinate officials responsible to himself, and so he would continue to do under the plan I have suggested."

"Yes, but these are officials acting under his orders and removable at his pleasure, and experienced moreover in managing this sort of business."

"Experienced in doing things the wrong way, I suspect, which is worse than not having experience at all. But letting that pass again, I ask, are not the generals and staff of the army, and the local control officers, acting under the orders of the Secretary of State just as much as the clerks of this office, and cannot he remove any one of them from employment if he sees occasion to do so?"

"But surely you would not propose to put military men to control other military men in financial matters?"

"Why not? There are plenty of soldiers who are only so in name,"—I could not help thinking of Burley at the moment, who had probably not been on horseback for the last thirty years—"but every soldier is a citizen, and does not take leave of his wits or his rights by putting on uniform. There is quite as much common-sense to be found in the army as in this office, I assure you, and quite as much sense of responsibility. Do you suppose that if you give a general twenty thousand pounds to spend, and hold him responsible for not exceeding the amount, there would be any danger of his doing so? The danger, I believe, is quite the other way; we keep all our officers in such tight leading-strings all their life that the fear is they would be found unequal to the

responsibility if it were put upon them. And after all I am not speaking about the *audit;* the final audit of the accounts would, of course, rest with the audit department, as at present: my proposal refers only to the power of initiation."

"This scheme is so entirely novel," said Mr Aweditte, after a pause, "that I am hardly prepared to reply at once, but I foresee numerous objections."

"I deny that it is novel. It may be here; but in India, where they do understand the art of administration—although they have their faults too—and how to work a military machine that shall not collapse when the first strain is put upon it, the principle is fully understood and acted upon. In India you have military men as disbursers, and accountants and auditors too, and I appeal to Sir Mordaunt Burley, who knows the facts just as well as I do, although he may not have been in India, whether the Government control there is any weaker in consequence; whether, on the contrary, the complaint is not that the supervision of these military officers is not too rigorous and exacting? But we need not go to India for illustrations. What happens on every occasion of war? Don't you then make your generals supreme in everything, over life and death, even over the money-chest?"

"Yes, but a state of war is a different thing."

"You may well say so, and so you would find if

war were to break out. And can anything more severe be said in condemnation of your system than that it is only intended to work in peace time? Yet that is the truth, though I suppose it will take a war and a catastrophe for the nation to discover it. People will then wake up to find that this costly, this overdone, this cumbersome centralised machine, which you have been building up since the Crimean war, which only works now with infinite friction and creaking and groaning at every joint, only works at all in time of peace, and will collapse when the first strain is put upon it, and then it and we shall be swept away amid the indignant outcry of an indignant nation."

This was strong language, indeed a great deal more than I had intended to say; but in fact, I lost my temper, and the discussion now became warm and somewhat personal, Burley declaring that on behalf of the department he treated these insinuations with the contempt they deserved, adding something about youth and ignorance, while I retorted that it was quite possible to be old and stupid, till eventually Lord Stowe interposed, and at first hardly with success, to allay the storm. "Gentlemen, gentlemen," he said, "pray consider that we are here to discuss public business; pray do not let us allow personal considerations to interfere with public affairs; pray do not, &c., &c." The result, however, was that, after a great deal of talk bearing very

little upon the matter in hand, the meeting broke up without any definite conclusion being come to, and therefore leaving things as they were. The only person who remained at all cool in the matter, except our noble chairman, who was as good a hand at pouring out oil as my former colleague the chairman of the Agricultural and Commercial Assurance Company, was Bracton; but he did not prove the ally that I had looked for, the substance of his remarks being to the effect that there appeared a good deal of force in what Captain West urged, but that a matter of this kind, affecting the principles of conducting a great department, would need to be carefully considered. Bracton evidently did not expect to remain long in the office, and had no mind to take a fresh burden on his shoulders; and I must add, the suspicion did occur to me that there may be such a thing as *jealousy* of one another, even among Government officials.

"This comes of bringing a peppery captain of horse into the office," said Mr Wrythem to Mr Aweditte, in audible tones, as they went down-stairs together. Such, no doubt, I had appeared, and thoroughly dissatisfied I felt with the result of the meeting; ashamed of having lost my temper so easily; disheartened at the prospect of so much opposition, especially at the mass of inertia that would resist all progress. I felt, too, how much ground I had lost by this short morning's work. Henceforward, I felt certain, Lord

Stowe would avoid interviews and discussions, and Awedittе and the other permanent officials would regard me as an impulsive young simpleton, to be humoured but made little account of in the business of the place.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LEATHERBY IN ARMS.

As I walked home that evening, dispirited and annoyed, I felt half tempted to give up my post, and return to the role of independent member. Free from official shackles, I could say what I pleased, and one might create a very pretty sensation by stumping the country after Pendragon's fashion, and denouncing our military maladministration. But then it would be mean to make use of official knowledge in this way; and besides, what good would come of it eventually? If the head of a department (albeit a subordinate one) was powerless for reform, what chance would any one outside the department have by any amount of declamation, either in Parliament or out of it? This plan then was not to be thought of seriously; there was nothing to be done but to hold on, and trust to time and the chapter of accidents for bringing about something better.

Meanwhile happily a diversion was afforded by the coming manœuvres. The preparation for them had

kept us all in town far into August, but to run down into Yewcestershire was now fairly in the way of business.

The mimic campaign promised to be more than usually interesting. How the Government ever came to work itself up to the point of sanctioning the expenditure for operations in such a distant region, I hardly know; and indeed they would gladly have drawn back if they could when the estimates came to be added up; but such an outcry was raised at the rumour of this, and Mr Strickland, who was a very influential member and had taken a great interest in the scheme for using his county as the scene of action, expressed himself so warmly about it, and the *Dial* came out with such continuous articles on the unequalled advantage of Arrowdown as a training-ground, that it was determined to stick to the plan, and to reduce expense by cutting down the size of the force to be employed. Two skeleton army corps were to be formed, of about eight thousand men each, whereof one, starting from Drymouth as a base, was to advance northwards. The other was to be formed in two separate divisions, one of which, conveyed to the spot in the Channel squadron, was to make a landing in the Bay of Birdseye; while the second, advancing from Yewcester and Leatherby up the valley of the Yew, was to form a junction with the first, when the united corps would move southwards and drive back the defenders on their base. The latter, on the other

hand, were to try and prevent the junction, and to hurl back the invading division on the sea. Thus, besides land manœuvres on an unusually extended scale, there would be a disembarkation and all its concomitant difficulties; so that the autumnal practice promised to be unusually interesting and useful.

The excitement at Leatherby when we got down there was tremendous, for a regiment of hussars had arrived the day before, to say nothing of a battalion of the Guards, Leatherby being the point where the railway had to be abandoned for the road, and these troops were now encamped on various bits of open ground about the place, while men and officers in all the splendour of full albeit rather shabby uniform thronged the little streets. Considering that the greatest military spectacle ever witnessed before in these parts had been the occasional apparition of a recruiting sergeant and the drilling of the local company of Volunteers, the general exaltation of feeling that prevailed may be imagined, while the popularity of Lord Stowe and myself, who were credited with the furnishing of all this amusement and excitement for the edification of the borough—to say nothing of the spurt given to the local market—went up to quite a point of enthusiasm, which naturally culminated in the grand banquet got up in our honour, a ceremonial which came off with great *éclat* in a spacious marquee brought over from Yewcester for the occasion. The dinner, supplied by our esteemed fellow-townsman

the proprietor of the Three Butts, was served up in his usual well-known style, covers being laid for fifty-seven. Mr Rupert Bowles took the chair, having Lord Stowe on his right and the Paymaster-General on his left, while the banquet—in addition to Mr Strickland, Mr Sheepshanks, and other local magnates—was graced by the presence of Colonel the Honourable Bayrskyn Shakkow and officers Scots Grenadier Guards, Lieut.-Colonel Leitwayte and officers 22d Hussars, "all in full regimentals," said the *Leatherby Express*,—which came out with a special extra gratis edition next day, descriptive of the festive occasion,—"the splendid glitter of which set off admirably the quiet but refined aspect of the darker costume worn by the rest of the company." The same paper of course reported in full detail the "really eloquent speech of their respected fellow-townsman who so ably filled the chair," proposing the health of their late and present members; as well as Lord Stowe's "sonorous yet humorous reply." And indeed his lordship came out in his best bow-wow manner; and when he described how the idea had first occurred to him of having the manœuvres "at what he might, from long and dear associations, almost venture to term his native place (great applause); how, when the peculiar advantages offered for training in the art of war by the noble uplands of this county presented themselves to his mind, he had, by the advice and aid of his colleagues, his able and gallant and experienced

colleagues (continued applause), determined to carry out the idea; how, notwithstanding the difficulties and discouragement that beset his path, he, that is, the department over which he had the honour to preside, had persevered to the end, till now the fruit of his labours might be seen in the martial array which at this moment surrounded the spacious—well, the spacious structure in which this magnificent entertainment was being held," and so forth; then his gratified audience, excited at once by this inspiriting declamation and the sparkling Yewcestershire cider which graced the banquet, became wrought up to a pitch of enthusiasm, until they got for the moment to regard the noble speaker as a sort of incarnation of Napoleon and Von Moltke rolled into one; little suspecting, while his lordship was thus enthusiastic himself about the manœuvres, and the cause of enthusiasm in others, how bored he was in reality with the whole thing, and longing to be off to Switzerland with his dear Sophia and the rest of his daughters, for Lord Stowe was a thoroughly domestic man. And I doubt if he was altogether pleased at being bracketed in the honours of the occasion with a comparatively subordinate official. On this latter point I could sympathise with him, but it was quite impossible to make my constituents understand the difference between a Cabinet Minister and a junior member of the Government like myself. Seen by the foreshortening of Leatherby perspective, a Secretary of State and a

Paymaster-General seemed both such great personages as to be practically equal. I confess that I had laboured under a delusion of the same sort before taking office, fancying in my simplicity that the members of the Government, even including those not in the Cabinet, would be like a band of brothers, always discussing state secrets and matters of deep import together, whereas in fact our only bond of union was the sitting upon the same bench in the House. Even there we juniors sat up at the far end, and we knew no more what was going on out of our own department (very often of what was going on in it) than the office messengers, and, except in the cases where there was private intimacy, we were hardly on speaking terms with each other. Mr Merrifield indeed used to ask us to dinner in turns, just as Dr Church, when I was at Mugby, used to ask the sixth-form fellows in to breakfast; but I doubt if the Duke of Ulster (Mr Merrifield's brother-in-law), or Lord Grandison, who were the two greatest swells in the Ministry, knew some of us even by sight.

But this is a digression. Leatherby topics should be done justice to, and the greatest after the banquet was unquestionably Mrs Scrap's garden-party, which came off the following afternoon. The occasion was a great one, and the lady was equal to it. The invitation to the Guards and the Hussars unfortunately came too late, for those distinguished regiments had marched off towards Stampton early in the morning,

the inspiriting strains of their bands waking up the inhabitants as they slept off the effects of the entertainment; and the only representatives of the profession remaining were a young assistant-surgeon, left behind in charge of some sick men (and who on the strength of his cocked-hat was regarded by the population as being almost a general officer), and some officers of the Control Department, which body was now cast loose all over the country, scattered about the towns and villages by twos and threes like a regiment of cavalry on outpost duty, and whose martial appearance in their sabres and pouch-belts gave almost as much satisfaction to the community as if they had really belonged to that branch of the service. But Lord Stowe had been secured, looking as pleased as if the lawn at Holly Lodge had been the slopes of Windsor, and he alone would have made the party a success. Mr Strickland was there too, which was even a more gratifying circumstance, for he had been always a greater magnate in Yewcestershire than Lord Stowe, who, when Lord Waymouth, had been disposed to make himself rather cheap. Mrs Scrap had flown to Eva on her arrival at Church Street two days before, and it was amusing to notice the altered manner with which that good lady regarded my wife. The patronising affectionateness of our last stay was now succeeded by affectionate admiration; for had not Eva's name appeared in the list of visitors at various fashionable receptions

and even on still more distinguished occasions; besides, was she not understood to be on the most intimate terms with Mrs Strickland?

This, indeed, was connected with her visit. "You can't think what a number of funny things Mrs Scrap has been saying," Eva observed that evening; "but she ended by saying there was a very particular favour she wanted us to do, and that is to convey—well, I don't exactly remember how she put it, for it was such a long story; but she wants the Stricklands to come to her party, and she wants me or us to manage it for her. What is to be done?"

"I don't mind asking Strickland, if I see him tomorrow," was my reply, "for he is a good-natured fellow enough, but I would certainly rather not say anything to the ladies about it; there are limits even to the audacity of a borough member." And I was probably right; for when next day I met him on the street—the Stricklands were staying with the Bamfyldes—and told him that a very charming lady and sound Liberal was anxious to secure some of the distinguished company with which the neighbourhood was now thronged for her garden-party, he said at once *he* would go with pleasure,—laying, however, such a stress on the personal pronoun, as intimated that he could not be responsible for anybody else. However, Tom Strickland, whose battalion was not engaged in the manœuvres, and who came down from town just in time, was secured for the occasion; but

I regret to say that he behaved somewhat inconsiderately, keeping beside Sybil and Eva the whole afternoon, and hardly speaking to his hostess.

Mr Strickland did not get off so easily, for Mrs Scrap having secured his arm for a promenade of the grounds, he was in a manner tied down.

"A very pretty place you have here," he observed.

"It *is* a pretty little place, we think," replied the lady; "but of course very small compared to what you are accustomed to."

"And what a pretty view you have," added the gentleman, turning the conversation: "Leatherby looks pretty from every point, but I don't know a nicer view of it than this."

"Yes, it is very pretty, we think. I am told that the views from Stampton Court are very fine?"

How her companion replied to this home-thrust I did not hear.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AUTUMN MANŒUVRES.

ALTHOUGH Leatherby had been thus thrown into excitement by the advent of the military, the spectacle was but transitory, for the town was quite out of the scene of operations. Stampton, which lay nestled on the upper Yew, just on the edge of the moorland, formed the real point of departure of the right flank of the force, and a large party had been invited to witness the manœuvres from Stampton Court, including Mr Merrifield and his family, who were expected to arrive in a day or two. We had moved on thither the morning after the garden-party, and found a brigade encamped in the park, with outposts pushed on to the edge of the moors beyond, the white tents glistening among the noble oaks; while the little town, if such it could be called, of Stampton, was crowded with visitors. Arrowdown was always affected to a certain extent by autumn tourists, and now that the benefit of its breezy air could be enjoyed simultaneously with a view of the manœuvres, quite a locust-like flight of visitors had set in. The

Red Lion had been engaged bodily for the representatives of foreign armies; the White Horse was brimful of umpires; and every conceivable form of vehicle appeared to have been impressed for the occasion. Lord Stowe had taken up his quarters in the neighbouring residence of his relative the Earl of Ben Nevis; while Burley had secured lodgings for himself and his bread-and-beef charts over the grocer's shop, with the use of an ancient diminutive barouche drawn by a pair of still more diminutive ponies.

At Stampton Court we found that a sort of saturnalia had replaced the quiet which ordinarily characterised that well-regulated household. A perpetual garden-party seemed to be going on; the public rooms and the terrace on which they looked out were thronged with visitors: county squires, London folks, foreign officers in blue, foreign officers in green, British officers in red; officers in bluchers, officers in gaiters, officers with haversacks, all coming and going; five o'clock tea in the drawing-room, popping of champagne on the lawn; the correspondent of an illustrated paper meanwhile taking a sketch of the proceedings right in front of the windows. Mrs Strickland was literally keeping open house, for as many people came in by the windows as by the doors, and the ceremony of obtaining a previous invitation appeared to be dispensed with for the occasion. Soldiering and soldiers were not the commonplace objects they have come to be in more central regions;

and from the general state of excitement and relaxation of etiquette it was almost as if the campaign were a real one, and Stampton Court under military requisition. Late into the warm night the doors remained open, and warriors and other visitors came and went between the house and the village and camp; and standing on the terrace one might detect the subdued murmur of the troops resting in the park below, the occasional neigh of a horse breaking the silence.

But there may be too much of a good thing, and our genial host can scarcely have been sorry when the troops broke up from their camp and marched off towards the moor, the only relics of their presence being a broken-down sutler's cart or two, the dust, the paths which even in that short time had been worn in the green turf, and the straw and litter which would not be effaced till the winter rains came down. Riding up on to the moors that afternoon the troops seemed at first sight to have vanished altogether, for no sign of them was to be detected on the wide expanse, as we looked across one of the largest prospects to be seen in our island. But the disappearance was soon explained. The great moor, which looked when seen from one end like a broad plain, was in reality intersected by numerous narrow glens, well wooded for the most part and sheltering small hamlets, and all containing the brawling streams of water without which the campaign would have

been impossible. Down in these glens were pitched the various camps, the high lands being occupied by the pickets, which a more careful examination could detect. And in one of these glens we found our hosts of the day, pitched by the side of a little brook which tumbled along to join the Yew, its waters abounding with diminutive trout. This was our first day's experience of the campaign. The operations in the early part would be near enough to allow of our return each day to Stampton Court; but Mr Strickland had arranged, when the troops should work more to the westward, for transferring the head-quarters of his party to a shooting-box some twenty miles off across the moor, where it was expected we should be in the very centre of operations.

"A splendid country this certainly is for manœuvres," said he, as we rode home that afternoon; "it was really quite a stroke of genius in Stowe to think of choosing it, for which I should not have given him credit. Plenty of room here for manœuvring, and for exhibiting skill in keeping up the supplies."

"Very good for the handful of men we have here, so long as the weather is fine, and a capital place to test the powers of our shop in Pall Mall to feed them. And if anxious forethought, and deliberation, and multiplicity of rules, and telegrams, and staying in office after hours, and generally doing other people's business ten times over, will insure success, then success will be accomplished. But we run it very

fine. We shall just pull through, I daresay; but give us five hundred men more to move, and we and our five hundred clerks would have broken down. Anyhow the beautiful complexity of the machine would surprise and delight you. The Strasburg clock or Babbage's calculating machine is nothing to what we can show in the way of wheel-work. But, dear me, I ought not to be telling tales out of school in this fashion."

These remarks had scarcely been made, when, as if by way of commentary, we were suddenly greeted by young O'Hagan, the member for North Cork, who was touring in these parts got up like a theatrical *krankentrager*, and who came running up excitedly as we entered the park gates, which opened upon one of the streets of the town.

"Holloa, West, you are the very man I am looking for; I have just been up to the house to try to find you. There are a lot of people over at Minton absolutely starving."

"Where's Minton?"

"Away up on the moor yonder, about seven miles north of this. Three companies of the 110th, as fine a set of young fellows as ever you saw; there they are out on the bare plain, and not a blessed thing to eat or drink either, barring the river, and that's only a bit of a watercourse."

The story came out by degrees. This detachment had marched down from Withicombe-on-Sea that

morning with orders to halt for the night at Minton, where, they were told, they would find rations and forage, to be sent out under the orders of the Assistant-Controller at Stampton. But arriving there after a twenty-mile march, towards the afternoon, they found nothing awaiting them. There was not a village for miles, and no signs of other troops; and but that O'Hagan came upon them in his ride their situation would never have been discovered, for this point was quite beyond the line of operations.

"The major in command seemed puzzled what to do," continued O'Hagan, "as well he might be, for his cattle were all done up by the bad roads. I would have lent him money to buy food, and willing; but what would be the good of a five-pound note to a man, and he without so much as a baker's shop within hail?"

Clearly these unfortunates could not be left to starve, and O'Hagan and I hurried off down the street in search of some member of the Control Department. Nor were we long in finding one, but he was quite a subordinate and could not help us. He was in charge of the reserve supplies, he said, and only issued stores from the reserve to the different field-magazines; he had nothing to do with the issue of anything direct to the troops, nor could he by any means break through the rules without orders from a superior. Clearly the worthy official did not recognise the Paymaster-General as coming under that category, pos-

sibly because he had never heard my name before. So there was no help to be got from him; but while we were discussing the matter, two more officers of the department returning from the camp came in sight, trotting slowly up the street, with the air of men who had done a day's work. To them the impulsive O'Hagan told his tale.

One of the two officers seemed inclined to doubt the accuracy of the account. The 110th did not belong to their division, and could not have been sent across the moor without notice being given. The Quartermaster-General's Department always sent them notice of changes of movement, so that the supplies might be arranged accordingly.

The other officer observed, that at any rate it was no business of theirs, for that Minton would be in the yellow circle, to be fed from Withicombe-on-Sea, and producing his map, he showed us a patch of yellow colour covering the northern part of it. "That's the Withicombe Control Circle, you see, and there is Minton within the yellow boundary. *We* only feed the troops so long as they are within the *green* circle, number two, and that you see does not come within a good mile of Minton. I am really very sorry, gentlemen, but I do not see how I can help you in the matter. Are you quite sure," he added, turning to O'Hagan, "that the detachment is actually at Minton? Because if it happened to be encamped a mile to the south, why then, it might be regarded as

coming within the green circle, and I think I could strain a point, and manage to send these men some food, although, strictly speaking, it would be against orders to do so."

While O'Hagan was looking as if trying to remember whether the detachment was not after all encamped exactly one mile south of the village, another actor appeared on the scene in the person of Sir Mordaunt Burley himself, whose diminutive barouche came rumbling down the little street towards the grocer's shop, the proprietor leaning back therein with his arms folded, and an expression of unutterable sagacity beaming in his face, a roll of the bread-and-beef chart occupying the back seat. Him stopping in the street, O'Hagan appealed to for aid, telling over again his sad tale.

Sir Mordaunt Burley thought there must be some mistake. "But no matter," he added, with an air of sublime determination; "we will not stand on ceremony in the matter: the detachment shall be fed, Mr O'Hagan—the detachment shall be fed; our system is a very elastic one,—such cases as these are easily dealt with. Issue the rations at once, Mr Forredge, if you please; issue the rations at once."

"But the Chief-Controller," urged that official, hesitatingly, "the Chief-Controller has given orders——"

"Consider me your Chief-Controller, sir," broke in Burley, majestically, from the barouche; "obey my orders implicitly in this matter, sir, if you please, and

I will absolve you from all consequences." And Burley glanced at the bystanders, as much as to say, "these rules are all very well for ordinary officials, but true greatness rises superior to them. Genius begins where rules end."

Having thus helped us over our difficulty, Burley proceeded on his road; but O'Hagan determining to see his mission accomplished, we followed Mr Forredge to the depot, where the official in charge, one Commissary Wrayshun, the same who had been deaf to our first remonstrances, proceeded to pack a cart with the needful supplies, but in a grave and reproachful manner, as if the issue of stores direct from the reserve to a detachment, without being passed through a divisional or even a brigade depot, jarred against his sense of the innate fitness of things.

But the matter did not end even here, for while we were looking on at the packing of the cart, another officer of the department, senior to Mr Forredge, came riding up. To him, mutely inquiring by his manner what grave irregularity was in course of being committed, the young member again recounted the condition of the ill-fated detachment.

The senior brightened up at once. "Oh yes," said he, "of course. I am really very sorry, but it is partly my fault, I fear. I quite forgot to give notice about it; but our general had a telegram this morning, to say the 110th would be transferred to his division. This, of course, accounts for the whole

affair. I fully meant to have communicated the matter to the department. But all this comes," he added, apologetically, "of doing things in such an irregular manner. What business have general officers to be making changes of this sort in the distribution of the troops without giving proper notice to the department? I am sure Sir Mordaunt Burley would never approve of such proceedings."

"I don't know what Sir Mordaunt Burley may approve or disapprove," said O'Hagan, indignantly, as we walked away from the scene, "and I don't care; but I know this, that I'll denounce the whole proceedings as positively infamous from my place in Parliament." [The vehement young member pronounced the word as if it were spelt Pahrlemint.]

I felt that it would not become me to join with an outsider in running down a department with which I was officially connected, so made no answer.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CRITICAL.

Two days after the occurrence described above, Mr Strickland transferred the headquarters of himself and his remaining guests, who now comprised ourselves, with Mr, Lady Elizabeth, and Miss Merrifield, from Stampton Court to the shooting-box on the moor. This little cottage contained sleeping accommodation for only a small portion of the party; the remainder were bestowed in a farmhouse about a couple of hundred yards off, but we all assembled for meals in the little parlour, which had just room for us to sit down in. But we were not much indoors; the weather was fine, and each day brought its occupation in the shape of an excursion to the scene of action, for which we started after an early breakfast, the elder ladies in a little carriage drawn by hardy Arrowdown ponies, the rest on horseback, our numbers daily augumented by stray visitors who had found their way out to these remote parts, till our party often developed into a cavalcade only sur-

passed in number by the infinite elasticity of our host's table. It was in fact an extended picnic, the unconventional strangeness of which, so different from our ordinary experiences, constituted a charm in itself for all. A life of this sort would of course have been impossible under ordinary circumstances. For a number of people, including a distinguished Minister, to crowd together in a little cottage, even in search of Arrowdown breezes, would have been an absurdity, and no doubt the thing would very soon have been voted a bore; but the neighbourhood of the troops, with generals, foreign deputies, and even still higher personages, all more or less roughing it in canvas on the open moor, rendered our quarters within four walls comparatively luxurious, albeit there was hardly room to sit round the dining-room; and the little closet adjoining it, which we styled the drawing-room, contained scarcely anything besides the cottage piano which had been sent out for the occasion. Under these circumstances all parties seemed to enjoy the roughing, especially such of us as were quartered in the desolate-looking farmhouse, whose occupants' sole excitement up to this time had been their weekly visit to the little market-town twelve miles across the moor, and who in winter were often snowed up for a month together. The only people who grumbled were the ladies'-maids, a brace of whom had improvidently been brought out. Everybody else declared this novel life and im-

provised arrangement to be perfect; the horses which had exchanged their hot stalls for an airy shed appeared to be as well contented as their riders, who occupied the various strange attics and lumber-rooms of the farm which now did duty for bed-chambers; and everyone declared that there was no spot on earth for wild beauty and fresh air like Arrowdown, and that to go to Switzerland or Scotland with all these delights so close at hand was mere conventional folly, no one, it so happened, except our hosts, having ever been here before, and every one in his heart intending never to come here again. Fortunately the weather was superb; a few fleecy clouds ever and anon passed along the sky, breaking the broad expanse into checkered lights and shades borne by the light breeze which banished heat; but the secret of the success of this picnic was that there was no time to become bored. After an early breakfast the whole party sallied forth each day, as already mentioned, Mrs Strickland driving Lady Elizabeth Merrifield in a pony-carriage, the rest on horseback, making for the day's scene of action, while a light cart laden with luncheon followed, hovering in our rear, in readiness to supply ammunition when needed, like the waggons of a field-battery. Fortunately, too, the expectation that this shooting-box would prove a convenient centre of operations was realised. Had either of the contending forces been distinctly victorious, the tide of mimic war would

soon have rolled away to the north or south; but each side stubbornly maintained its ground. The country was too open for successful surprises in the way of flank marches, while it placed the force attempting a direct attack in front at a great disadvantage. Day after day the contending generals manœuvred and fought, but so little advantage could be claimed for either side, that each evening the umpires must fain declare the contest drawn, and both sides entitled to maintain their ground. Thus, although the troops were on their legs all day, and long marches were made one way and another, we could see all that took place, and yet return each afternoon to dinner, the ladies in high spirits, sunburnt and hungry; while under the effect of exercise, appetite, and bracing air combined, everybody became exceedingly sleepy directly after dinner, and the cottage-piano was put very little into requisition.

It needs not be said that personally this visit was peculiarly welcome, independently of the pleasure of the occasion itself, and the fresh healthy life. It is of course gratifying to be asked to join a party in deshabille when a great Minister is one of the company, for when thrown together in this way, people see more of each other in a week than would otherwise be possible in a lifetime. I knew, of course, that Mr Merrifield could yawn like ordinary folks, having often seen him perform that operation in the House, but it was interesting to notice the freshness

with which he entered into the novel life, and the zest he exhibited for the small details of the occasion. Business, indeed, could not be got rid of even on Arrowdown, and express messengers provided by Mr Strickland brought out daily despatch-boxes from Stampton for the Minister; but he managed to dispose of their contents when the rest of the party were in their rooms, and to all appearance had as much leisure as the rest of us, declaring that he had never enjoyed so complete a holiday before.

Lord Stowe also complained, when we met him on the moor, that he too could not escape from business; but my private belief is that he did nothing whatever, and that the work of the department, such as there was, was conducted by Bracton, who remained behind in town. But in fact the department was so busily engaged in looking after the miniature army in the field before us, that the rest of the British army was allowed to take care of itself for a season. "Things seem admirably managed, in my opinion," said Lord Stowe, whom we met one day riding through the camp, mounted on a stout and slow-moving pony, his trousers in the course of equitation having worked well up his legs, displaying a margin of comfortable socks above his ankle boots. "See here, the fighting is barely over, and yet the men have got their tents, and their fuel, and their rations, and are cooking their dinners already. What have you got there, my man?" said

his lordship, addressing one of a group of soldiers engaged upon a camp kitchen, who appeared from his air of authority to be the *chef de cuisine;* "what have you got in that pot?"

"Well," said the man, all unconscious, like the child accosted by the fairy, what superior company he was in, "they calls it a sassage; leastways a German sassage. 'Tain't an English one, that's certain."

"And very good a German sausage is, too," observed his lordship; "I should like to taste it, my friend, if you will allow me."

The man hesitated for a moment, but we were a large party, and he held up the sausage on the lid of a kettle, while Lord Stowe, drawing a penknife from his pocket, proceeded to cut off a thin slice and then to eat it, holding it delicately between his finger and thumb, the penknife in the other hand, the reins loose on the pony's neck.

"A most excellent sausage, upon my word," said Lord Stowe, rolling the portion about his mouth as if he were tasting a sample of port wine. "Strickland, do try a bit. You will, Miss Strickland, at any rate? just to see how well we look after these fine fellows." Lord Stowe I suspect at this moment fancied himself to be quite another Mark Antony, mixing like that popular commander on friendly terms with his troops, or a sort of Charles XII. going the rounds in disguise.

"Gen'lman's so fond of sassages," replied another

man, who was on his knees feeding the fire with sticks, "he'd better 'ave the 'ole biling of 'em, and welcome. Sassages ain't much good without a mossel of bread to eat 'em with."

"What! do you mean to say you get no bread, my man?" asked Lord Stowe, not knowing quite whether to pursue the jocular style or to appear annoyed.

"Oh yes, we gets a bit o' bread now and agin, and werry good bread it is, when we does get it," said number one; "but we ain't a got any to-day. You see, it's what they calls the Control Department as does it; they thinks we ought to control of our happetites."

"Yes, guv'nor," observed number two, "that's where it is, and now you know about the long and short of it."

At this juncture an officer came towards us, whereon the men became silent, and explanations ensued. No notice had been given that the regiment would be encamped out on the flank like this, and so the bread had not come up, and the men were going to dine on their reserve supply of sausage-soup, but it was understood they would receive their proper rations by evening.

"I take leave to mention, Lord Stowe," said Tom Strickland, as we rode away towards the spot where our luncheon-cart was awaiting us, "that this is a militia regiment we have been talking to; these

yokels were probably only enrolled a few days before the manœuvres began."

"Well, Strickland," said Lord Stowe, as he sat resting against a low stone wall, with a plate of cold chicken on his lap, and a tumbler of claret-cup on a stone beside him, "I think we may say that the commissariat part of the manœuvres has been as successful as the rest. West here predicted all sorts of failures, but the worst thing that has come before us has been the case of this militia regiment just now, which we found lunching on excellent soup. I must say I think that this amounts to a very decided success."

"They have got about sixteen thousand men out here," I observed; "we had three months' preparation, and have splendid weather; and with these combined conditions, and with the whole strength and attention of the War Office staff, high and low, to help, we have managed to do the work respectably. This hardly proves much. But that is not my objection. No one ever supposed that there would be a break-down under such circumstances. If our great department could not manage not to starve this little bit of an army, its incompetence would stand confessed. There would obviously be no room left for argument. My objection is of a different sort. You have literally thrown away the advantage of the manœuvres, so far as this important part of the work goes. You have given the generals their

troops to knock about, and so far they and their staff have made use of the opportunity, and have learnt a good deal, no doubt. And this practice is of course a capital thing for our army generally, at least for the very small part of it engaged. But why deliberately throw away one of the most useful parts of the lesson—the art of feeding an army? The troops have been well enough fed, I daresay, although it is only by a sort of miracle that things don't go wrong. But how it is all done is a perfect mystery to the generals. They see the beef and bread go down the men's throats, but where it comes from they don't know and don't care. Yet if we were in a foreign country this would be just the part of their business which would occupy their attention most. You could not work then with bread-and-beef charts, and send down everything by special train from town. The fact is, our generals, as you deal with them, are just like children who are given toys to play with, all packed and ready for use in a box. They enjoy playing with them, but how they are made, and where they come from, they have not the slightest idea."

"But surely," said Mr Strickland, "it is not to be desired that generals should do these things? Surely their time ought not to be taken up in details of this sort, when they have to be planning great operations of war?"

"When I say the general should do these things,

I mean, of course, his staff acting in his name; but they are kept just as much in the dark as he is about the details of administration. You pick out some of the ablest men in the army for your local Controllers, and then give them nothing to do."

But at this point Lord Stowe's attention was diverted by Miss Strickland and Miss Merrifield, with whom he entered into lively conversation, giving them, in politely paternal fashion, a highly lucid account of the day's operations. "The infantry, you see, my dear young ladies, no longer receives the charge of cavalry in squares, as it used to do. At Waterloo, where an uncle of mine served in your brother's regiment, Miss Strickland, the French Cuirassiers over and over again charged our squares, trying to break into them by sheer weight—their cuirasses make them very heavy, you know; but even with this advantage their efforts were of no avail; they were received at the point of the bayonet, and fell by hundreds, transfixed on these deadly weapons."

"Dear me," said Miss Strickland, "I don't think if I were a foot-soldier, I could help running away in that case. Fancy having a heavy dragoon, or even a light one, coming at you full gallop, to ride you down! I don't think I should be able to stop him I had ever so sharp a bayonet."

"The bayonet is a very effective weapon," replied Lord Stowe; "I saw a passage of arms at the riding-

school of the Bayswater barracks the other day, between a man on foot with a bayonet and a man on horse with a sword, and the first had quite the best of it. But nowadays we trust more to the improved efficiency of firearms, and the cavalry are not allowed to charge squares, or indeed to show themselves out of cover. There were several mistakes made this morning, by the way, which I noticed, cavalry exposing themselves, and infantry too, where some of them would certainly have been shot if it had been a real battle. All this was of course quite irregular, I am given to understand; still, on the whole, it was an extremely interesting sight. I do so wish Sophia and the rest of my girls could have been here to see it."

"Yas," said (in answer to a query from Tom Strickland) a distinguished officer from one of the South American Republics who had joined the luncheon-party: "Yas, dey are ver fine troops, ver fine, indeed; we do all zay dat. Yas, vat we do zay is dat de infanterie is ver good, de cavalerie is meessrivalled, and de artillerie is superbe. Ah no, dat is not it; it is de infanterie is ver good, de cavalerie vich is superbe, and de artillerie vich is meessrivalled—no, unrifalled, dat is it—de artillerie is unrifalled. So we all say. But, comes it not dat your generals dey do want de—vat we call de *coup d'œil?* are dey not ver old?"

"My dear sir," replied Tom Strickland, "that is

part of our deep-reaching policy. You have heard that the Romans used to exercise their troops in extra heavy armour, so that when they came to put on their regular suits they felt quite spry, *extraordinairement agiles*, you understand? Just so with us. If we put on our regular war generals at these manœuvres, the troops would become really too sharp; so a rule has been passed—by Captain West here, or some of his set—that no one shall be qualified to command on such occasions who has not passed at least ten years *en retraite*, or who would have the faintest chance of being employed on actual service. Oh no, we keep one set of generals for peace manœuvres, and another in reserve for time of war, who meanwhile are called brigadiers and colonels."

"But dey zay you English do call yourzelves a pragdigal nation?"

"You must not take what this gentleman says seriously," I interrupted; "this is mere ribald jesting on his part."

"I thought," said Mr Strickland, who had just lighted a cigar, and was reclining next me behind the wall to shelter himself from the wind, which struck cool after the heat of the day,—"I thought this new Control Department was formed for the very purpose of doing on the spot all this work that you speak of? What else is it for, if not to help the general in such business?"

"That is the theory of the thing, no doubt, and as

far as size goes the department is big enough to do the work a dozen times over, if it were allowed, and it has been recruited from some of the ablest men in the service. But instead of this, the whole body, so far as I can make out, is regularly kept in leading-strings; all authority is retained in the War Office, and these Controllers and Assistant-Controllers, and the rest of them, with their high-sounding titles and comfortable pay, seem to be without any corresponding power and responsibility. All their business proper, down to the minutest point, is arranged for them by the people in Pall Mall, and these local officials are in fact mere post-offices for transmitting references between the War Office and the army, or agents for distributing the supplies which find their way down by some mysterious agency which they know nothing about."

"But this is as much as to say that people take leave of their common-sense when they enter upon military organisation. This seems hardly a reasonable assumption."

"I would not say that exactly. I think the phenomenon of our present defective military administration—and that it is extraordinarily defective is a matter of fact about which no one will have any doubt who inquires into the matter—I think this can be explained without the hypothesis of extreme stupidity. In the first place, the experiment has never really been fairly made. The men who have

been put to organise have usually come to the business with no previous knowledge of what is needed, and no distinct apprehension of the principles which lie at the bottom of all sound military administration, and perhaps, too, without having their hearts thoroughly in their work. To have organised our War Department successfully needed the undivided attention and full energies of a first-rate man, with a natural capacity for that sort of work. And that you have never had. At the most critical point of the matter, when, in consequence of the Crimean break-down, the nation was hot about reform, and when everything depended on the direction given to the course of organisation, you had an abstracted bookworm for your War Minister, thrust into the office against his own strong protest, set down to a duty utterly distasteful to him, and for which he had not the smallest natural aptitude. But, in fact, what between the management of their estates, and family interest, and their share in the general political business of the Government, and the time spent in the House, and the distractions of society, many of our public men only give the fag-end of their time and talents to their proper business of administering their departments. I declare I think it is a wonder rather how the work of some of the big offices gets done at all, than that it should be badly done."

"You have hit on the truth there, I fear. The idleness of some of our public men has been astound-

ing—not more so, however, than the industry of others. You see some men working like galley-slaves, as if their fortunes or their very lives depended on it. And the idlers have usually been the exceptions. But then the system of business in this country is adapted to this state of things—to meet the case, that is, of the heads of departments who live amid the distractions of political life, and can only give a fractional share of their attention to their official duties. Every one knows that the bulk of the business is and must be done by the permanent heads of departments—the Civil Service, in fact."

"No doubt that is so; but then, to make the thing work well, the political head must set a proper system agoing in the first instance. The subordinate officers can't do that, even if they knew how to set about it, which probably none of them do. The British Constitution may require, for example, that your War Minister should know nothing about his business, and have no special aptitude for it; but that is all the more reason why the understrappers should be experts—men who know the weak points of the army organisation from practical acquaintance with it, and are qualified by experience to set about reforming them. In fact, you ought to govern the army through the army. There is plenty of ability available for the purpose if you only got hold of it."

"Yes; but how are you to set about finding it out?"

"I admit it is not plain at first sight what the

machinery should be for selecting the right men. You might, of course, if the thing were jobbed, get a lot of mere plungers—men not even good clerks—and nothing else; but we don't even try to get them now. And although civil clerks may be all very well in their way—zealous, and honest, and so forth—still they must be apt to see the army through the refracting miasma of War Office influences, till many of them really seem to think that the army is something which exists merely to give employment to the Office. And certainly the present system favours the idea. The result is, that you have a great mass of inertia to overcome before anything can be done; and this can only be got rid of by pressure from above—that is, by a War Minister with a genius for administration. At any rate, our worthy friend sipping his coffee round the corner yonder is hardly the man to apply the lever, even if he had any spare moments not occupied in thinking about his dear Sophia and the rest of the girls in Switzerland."

"Is it not rather a strong fling at the whole body of these officials to describe them as obstructing reform in this manner?"

"I don't think so. For what, after all, do I assert? A man in an office imbibes a suspicion that his functions, and those of a number of the friends about him, are perfunctory and superfluous. What is he to do? In the first place, his conscience will be lulled by the specious argument that, after all, he

may very possibly be over-scrupulous, for that those whose business it is to take heed about these things, and who ought to be better judges than he is, appear perfectly satisfied with the arrangements. Further, he sees the perfect futility of action. He is powerless to do any good. He knows perfectly well that if, overborne by a sense of his superfluousness, he were so quixotic as to resign his post, the only result would be that it would be immediately filled up by somebody else, perhaps some one less competent. Besides, these qualms will only attack the newcomer; in a very short time he will get to believe, with those around him, in the innate fitness of things as he finds them. A man must be strangely independent who will long think differently from the five hundred superiors and equals with whom he is associated."

"But see," observed Mr Strickland, rising, "all the party are moving off: we must be going too. It seems from what you say that things are in a bad way, and without much chance of their improvement."

"A condition of Parliamentary government, I suppose, and to be accepted as such. The Admiralty is of course in the same boat, but there things are perhaps a little better, because there you have a staff of experts to help the first lord, and keep matters straight."

Here our conversation was broken off by the ter-

mination of luncheon, and the party began to mount their horses for the ride homewards, Eva and Sybil with Tom Strickland lagging behind, while the latter completed a sketch, which I grieve to say he had had the bad manners to take, furtively, of the distinguished South American officer who had joined us at luncheon, and who certainly, with his tight clothes, high epaulętted shoulders, and dark grinning face surmounted by a cocked-hat, looked not unlike a performing monkey.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BEATING ABOUT THE BUSH.

JUST as we were starting off, Mr Merrifield expressed a wish to explore the view from a neighbouring hill, which sloped up steeply from all sides, culminating in some gigantic granite boulders; and as I offered to show him a short cut homeward from that point, we turned off together towards it.

At the foot of the granite block we found a picket of cavalry, which took charge of our horses while we climbed to the summit. The point was certainly of sufficient strategic importance to justify its occupation, which prevented the enemy from stealing a march or manœuvring successfully for a surprise, for it commanded the view for many miles in every direction; and from the top we were not only able to see the whole of the force within whose lines we were, but we looked down also on the white tents of the hostile army a few miles further off, concealed by intervening ground from their opponent, but exposed to view from this commanding elevation. We thought

also we could make out the faint sea-line to the north, and the high lands on the coast to the south. We remained there for some time, enjoying the beauty of the prospect.

"It has certainly been very interesting to watch these manœuvres from day to day," observed Mr Merrifield, as we rode slowly homeward along the narrow moor-path. "And perhaps the most striking thing about them is the complete contrast between what we see here, the straggling columns moving about the roads, and these long lines of waggons, and the pickets and detachments scattered about everywhere—in short, the apparent irregularity of everything—the contrast between this and the conventional notions of what constituted military training, at least in my young days, when military manœuvres began and ended with a few stiff movements on a level parade."

"The conventional way of looking at things permeates all professions, but none more than the military. Men knew of course that what they were doing was not real training, or at least they might have known if they had thought about it. It was want of imagination, I suppose, that failed them."

"Have you had any opportunity, Captain West, of ascertaining what these foreign officers think about the way in which we have acquitted ourselves?"

"They express themselves very handsomely; but then they could hardly be otherwise than polite to

the hosts who have treated them so well. After all, these manœuvres don't bring out the best part of a British soldier. To see him at his best he ought to be seen fighting."

"But as to looks?"

"I think the foreigners could hardly be expected to fall into raptures about our militia at any rate; those bumpkins, for example, who were discussing their sausages just now. But I doubt if our army is much to look at, comparatively speaking. We English are said not to know how to dress, and the criticism certainly extends to our troops. And it always has been so. A very good soldier, speaking in his reminiscences of the great reviews of the Allied armies held at Paris after Waterloo, says that our troops were the most undersized, and the worst dressed, and generally meanest-looking of the whole lot, and that the Allies were astonished at the insignificant appearance of the victors in the famous battle."

Well, there is no doubt, I hope, about the fighting qualities. Our pardonable national vanity can hardly be deceiving us upon that point."

"It is curious to observe, by the way," I remarked, "how conventional the standard of courage is even now. We are told, for example, by military writers, that certain things are impossible in war, the point of impossibility being apparently reached when about one-fourth of a body of troops are *hors de combat.*

When that number of an attacking force are knocked over, it is considered legitimate to retire, or if they are defending a position, it is not considered disgraceful to yield it. The position is conventionally said to be untenable. But clearly because twenty-five men out of a hundred are killed or wounded, that does not affect the competency of the remaining seventy-five to stop where they are. They are still safe in wind and limb."

"I suppose," answered my companion, "there must be some great expenditure of vital energy in such moments, when men see death and destruction going on around them in every form. For judging, as you say, by military histories, troops seem to become exhausted and incapable of further effort, even although they may have been doing nothing all day but standing still. Certainly the slaughter used to be much greater in the battles of ancient times."

"The slaughter took place for the most part in the pursuit, I suspect. The beaten party had no time to get away when the fighting was all hand to hand, as they have in these days of long bowls. But I should say the standard of courage is higher now."

"From what do you make that inference?"

"Well, to take one well-known case. It was not considered incompatible with the attributes of the bravest of the Trojans that he should run away when his heart failed him; but nowadays no one dare run away even from a man double his size. You have to

take your chance if you come across a fellow of that sort; you are bound to stand for him if he comes at you."

"That must have been a difficulty with the knights of the middle ages also," said Mr Merrifield. "All the weakly men could not have gone into monasteries, and apparently there was no picking and choosing in the single combats of those days."

"Skill must have had a good deal to do with success then, I suppose, as it has now. The best swordsmen in the army are not for the most part hulking louts, such as are depicted in novels of the muscular school, but dapper fellows, often rather under than over middle-size. But I suppose you cannot have had leisure to read rubbish of that sort?"

"I waste time like other folk, and in other places than the House of Commons. Books of that sort afford certainly an amusing illustration of what you say about the conventional way of looking at things, the authors not seeing apparently that physical strength gives one man no advantage over another out of the prize-ring. Duelling, at any rate with pistols, made one man as good as another, so far as muscles went."

"And a blackguard like Guy Livingstone would assuredly have been shot sooner or later, as he deserved to be. In fact, if ruffians of that sort were really going about loose in the present day, it would be necessary to reinstitute duelling for putting them down."

My companion seemed to disapprove of this light way of speaking about duelling, for he changed the subject abruptly. "What you were saying about Hector and Achilles just now leads me to remark, that it is not so much probably the standard of courage as the way of manifesting it that alters with time. The ancients were less artificial in their habits than we moderns, and more impulsive."

"I think one gets a very good insight into some attributes of the ancient Greeks by observing their blood relations the Indians, who have many of their characteristics in an exaggerated form. If half-a-dozen Indians are quarrelling, and one of the lot, taking the initiative, lays about him with his cudgel, knocking all the others down, the latter will very probably stand it quietly, to use a bull, merely because he anticipates them in action. Yet these fellows are brave enough according to their lights, and make splendid soldiers under good disipline. Now our friends of this morning with the sausages would not stand being hit by anybody, even before they put on their red coats."

"True," replied Mr Merrifield, "and what you say is borne out very much by what people call the Iliad of the East—I mean the Ramayana. Are you acquainted with the book?"

"Only through translations. Being an Englishman, and having lived in India, of course I know nothing of Sanscrit."

"Well, I don't want to insult the shade of Homer by comparing the Ramayana to the Iliad, but you certainly have exhibited there in a striking because exaggerated form, the peculiar weakness of the Greek intellect, so acute and so strong in some respects, so defective in others, because entirely wanting in the critical faculty with respect to the value of evidence. The Hindoo mythology is not intrinsically more absurd than the Grecian, although it may be recited in a more extravagant way. Yet the Greeks appear for the most part to have accepted their theology unquestioning, just as I am told the Hindoos do at the present day."

"Their religion is certainly a very lively and vivid belief with the Hindoos. That any evidence should be required in support of it, is an idea it never occurs to them to entertain. That a story should be recited from the Ramayana is quite sufficient evidence of its truth, no matter how wildly extravagant or absurd it may be."

But I must not stop to repeat the whole of this conversation; and however delightful it might be to ride across Arrowdown in conversation with Mr Merrifield, listening to his disquisitions on the Aryan mythology, and borne on the flood of striking and beautiful ideas which he poured forth on the subject, I nevertheless grudged the time not given to the one thing I had most at heart, and from which we had now wandered away. Such an op-

portunity of unfolding my views to the person most able to give effect to them was not likely to occur again. The path we were traversing was just wide enough for the two horses to go abreast, but too stony and uneven for fast riding. For a *tête-à-tête* conversation, the situation was everything one could desire. No need to button-hole, and no fear of boring. Feeling the importance of the occasion, I became very anxious and impatient as the moments passed by, and we slowly mounted one crest after another of the rolling moor.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

COMING TO THE POINT.

At last Mr Merrifield himself gave a sudden turn to the conversation.

"It is curious to notice," he observed, "the progress of development in military as in other human affairs. I don't mean, of course, as to improvement in firearms and so on, but in the mode of tactics. So far as I understand these matters, the only mode of manœuvring recognised in the time of Marlborough, and even that of Frederic the Great, was by long lines made up of the whole army, or at most of wings. The notion of divisions and brigades, and then that of army corps, seems to have been of later date. Yet apparently this organisation would have been just as suitable in the times of Frederic as it is now. But mankind seems incapable of arriving at new ideas on these or any matters of political organisation *per saltum*. They are developed only by slow degrees."

"And just now," he continued, "we seem to be on the point of developing a new mode of fighting,

based, as I understand it, on individual intelligence compounded with a very strict discipline. The military discipline and training of the present day form, by the way, an excellent school for young men. I have been greatly struck with the thorough manner in which all regimental business is done in these camps. If I had a son instead of a daughter, I think I should certainly put him into the army for a season, before he settled down to some other profession."

It was gratifying to notice the favourable impression my companion had received on this head. I pursued the conversation, however, without remark. "This last development to which you refer may be ascribed to the changes in firearms, I think, which forced us to modify our mode of tactics, and was not due to the same spirit of development which brought about most of our changes."

"No doubt you are right as to that particular case; but although we are quite clear as to the present tendency of changes in warfare, we have no clearer notion than our forefathers what the next changes will be. All we know is that the nation which first acts upon the new idea will have for the time the advantage over the rest of the world—sad it is," he added with a sigh, "to have to say so."

"My own belief is that there is a great idea available just now to be seized upon. We have improved our artillery and musketry till one might suppose it would soon be impossible to stand up against them,

although it has to be remarked by the way that the proportion of killed and wounded in battle seems to be steadily diminishing instead of increasing, but the noticeable thing is that artillery and rifles both require daylight to be effective. Neither can do anything in a fog, still less in the dark. Here then you have a new idea for successful warfare."

"You mean by night attacks?"

"Precisely so. The troops that first learn to move by night will be able to laugh at the enemy's artillery, and ten thousand men may throw a whole army into confusion."

"But is not all experience of war to the effect that enterprises by night are liable to fail from the most trifling causes? From what I have understood of such matters, night attacks are such ticklish things that they hardly ever succeed."

"They have generally been improvised affairs, I fancy, adopted on the spur of the moment, and carried out in an imperfect, half-hearted way, the greater part of the troops engaged having probably no distinct information what the affair was all about. The sort of thing I have in view is very different from this. I am thinking of a systematic training, by which the troops would become as prompt and steady when moving in the dark as they are at present in daylight. I confess that I have no very distinct conception as yet of what the system should be—that must be left to be discovered by your process of development.

No doubt it will require a very high order of discipline and intelligence, but I have enough national vanity to think that this is just the sort of work in which our national qualities would give us a superiority; the same coolness and self-possession which distinguish our sailors would then have full play on land."

"But the secret would not be long kept, and then all nations would, after the first surprise, be put on a par again, except so far as the qualities you speak of might give the advantage to one or the other. The final result would merely be that we should be landed in a new mode of warfare."

"But the first start is everything in war. It may give you the superiority in perhaps the only great campaign you have to undertake in a century. Besides, this process of imitation by one nation of the improvements hit upon by another is, after all, a very slow one sometimes. Look at what has happened in our own day. The Prussians organised an entirely new system almost unobserved; yet although all the world knows how extraordinarily successful that system has proved, the French are only now beginning to talk about adopting it, and we are moving, if at all, in a contrary direction."

"Is that so? Surely this has been a time of inquiry and reform with us, and putting our military institutions on their defence as well as every other branch of the body politic? We seem to have been fully as busy as every other nation in that way."

"There has been plenty of fuss and plenty of change certainly, but mostly in the wrong direction I think."

"You refer to the abolition of purchase, I suppose? Is it possible, Captain West, that you can be an advocate for maintaining that mischievous, that iniquitous practice?" And my companion spoke with a somewhat heightened tone of voice, as if he were about to lose his temper.

"Oh no, please don't misunderstand me on that point," I replied, eagerly; "that change was absolutely essential, as it was pronounced to be, for all other reforms that were to follow; I did not refer in the least to that."

"Then what is it that you find fault with? That measure was merely one link in a chain of remedial measures which we have been engaged upon for some years past."

"I think the case may be stated in this way. The history of the Prussian army has been one of continuous improvement from the Napoleonic wars down to Metz. How has the same time been spent by us? The period from Waterloo to the Crimean war was one of complete stagnation, or rather we were going backward. Wellington's army and system were the creation of his patient genius; the War Department had not helped in any way to form it, and by degrees that splendid machine became rusty, and the men who knew how to work it had passed away. Since

the Crimean days there has certainly been a season of energy, more or less spasmodic, and always frightfully costly; but the energy, so far as administration goes, has been in great measure misdirected, and the result is that we have built up a cumbrous machine which hardly works in peace, and would utterly collapse in war. The result is, I verily believe, that we are absolutely worse prepared at the present moment for a war, should we unhappily become engaged in one, which heaven forbid"—I threw in this remark about heaven as a sop to Mr Merrifield, the allusion to war being evidently distasteful, as I inferred fron a restless movement he made in his saddle—"than we were in the Crimean days. For then we had merely to create everything; and although we did not happen to light upon the man of genius needed, possibly we might have done so if the war had gone on longer. But now the first thing to be done would be, not to create but to destroy. If the British army is not to go to immortal smash when called on active service, the War Office would have to be pulled to pieces, and the whole system of military administration built up anew. That is a nice prospect! A flank movement in face of the enemy with a vengeance. There is one other alternative, certainly. If you had the good fortune to hit upon a really first-rate man for leader of an expedition, he would probably pitch the system overboard, and simply improvise his own way of feeding and moving

the army; and then, instead of the War Office routine, with its checks and counter-checks, and its warrants, and circulars, and forms, and precedents, piled up in confusion one above the other till men can neither stand nor understand them, he would perhaps devise a rough-and-ready system of control and audit of his own. In fact, he would do over again what Wellington did in the Peninsula—organise a war department for service in the field. But what a strain to put on a general engaged before the enemy, and in these days too of short campaigns! And what a satire on our present organisation, that it only just pulls along while there is no strain on it, and would have to be set aside on the first occasion of its being wanted for real use!"

"That would be an alarming picture, indeed, if a true one. But is not your view morbid or exaggerated? I have observed that you express yourself very strongly on this point, Captain West, but I thought that was merely due to the prejudice of a military man who looked at things from the mere soldier's point of view. I should have expected a more dispassionate estimate of things from you, now that you have had some experience of office, and of the possibilities of government."

"I felt very strongly on the subject, Mr Merrifield, when first I had the honour of speaking to you about it, but I assure you I feel ten times more strongly now than I did then, and I have not been unobservant during my novitiate."

"Well, but I should like to hear your criticisms a little more in detail. Your denunciations, although hearty, have been somewhat vague so far. Cannot you give me an idea of some of the specific points of your objections?"

Here, then, was the very opportunity I had been longing for, and no words could express the tension of feeling I experienced in the desire to veil the anxiety struggling for expression under an outward calmness of manner. But just at this moment we were interrupted.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OUR REFORMER MEETS WITH THE RIGHT LISTENER AT LAST.

In the interest of our conversation I had not noticed that we had reached the point where our bridle-path cut in at an acute angle with the main road, and that although the open moor rendered all objects visible for a long distance, the rest of the equestrian party were now close to us, having reached almost simultaneously the point of junction. There was no alternative but to fall in with the cavalcade.

In the first excitement of this disappointment I did not notice Eva's absence from the party. On inquiry it was explained that she and Tom Strickland had taken another route across the moor. Tom declared, said his sister, that only a woman could be cruel enough to ride over such stony roads, and wanted all of them to follow his guidance along a short cut not more than two miles round. But she protested that he would infallibly lead them into a bog, as he did not know the country a bit, and only

my wife had the courage to accompany him. There they were, she added, over yonder, just disappearing over the crest of that rise on the right.

Mr Merrifield entered at once into lively conversation with the young ladies, declaring that he felt so braced up by this upland air that the day seemed only beginning instead of ending. But to a man accustomed, as he was, to spend the long weary nights in arguing, defending, replying, convincing all around, an hour or so of conversation must have been a mere relaxation. I don't think, by the way, that Sybil half appreciated the honour done her in being thus talked to—an honour disguised perhaps by the thoroughly unaffected manner in which it was conferred—and would much have preferred Tom Strickland's company. So foolish are young ladies. Νήπια τεκνα!

However, this interlude did not last long. Presently Mr Merrifield reined back his horse till I, who was riding a little in the rear, came up with him, and said, "I think Captain Strickland showed very good judgment in keeping off this abominably stony track. Cannot we follow his example and find a way for ourselves across the moor?" and so saying he turned off the road, and we were soon taking an independent line of our own in the general direction of the shooting-box. It was clear, then, that I had not bored the great Minister, since he himself thus pointedly sought a renewal of the conversation; and,

indeed, in a minute or two we had the army question on again at full swing, Mr Merrifield inviting me to state my views at length.

"I could not make them very short, I fear, if I tried," was my reply; "however, if I don't fatigue you there will be time to explain what I mean between this and the farm. It seems to me, then, that there are three important principles involved in this army question which have been lost sight of, but which, if acted upon, would go far to solve it. First, what you want is to have an army. That sounds like a mere truism, but the little point seems to be overlooked nevertheless. We have got an army certainly, but it is altogether too small to do anything with in war. And we have no means of augmenting it, for I need not say that these army reserves are the merest pretences of a reserve. The fact is, we should have to trust in war time to the slow and clumsy device of recruiting, and the war would be over before we had begun to get on our armour."

"But we have a larger army now than we have ever had before, at any rate in peace time?"

"That may be so, and for peace time the number of men embodied is perhaps larger than necessary, but the fact appears to remain that we have no force available of a strength that would enable us to act effectively. Allowing for recruits, and depots, and so forth, you might perhaps be able to place 50,000

effectives in the field, and you had very much better place none."

"Yet England has fought and won great battles with less than that number."

"Yes, but then the Continental armies were small also. Austerlitz was thought at the time to be a battle of the Titans, but neither side had a hundred thousand men in the field. Napoleon had a much smaller force at Jena. But other nations have expanded in their scale of making war, and we shall have to do the same. If we had to go to war for the defence of Belgium, for example—I am only taking this as an extreme illustration," I added, for at this point my companion made a gesture of impatience; "admitting for the sake of argument that the supposition is absurd, still it may be assumed that some case or other might conceivably arise, under a combination of possible if highly improbable eventualities" (I threw all this in to keep my companion quiet), "when we should have to intervene by arms, say, for instance, in defence of a colony; and then we should find that we were without the means of doing so, and the war would be over before we were ready to begin."

"If, by being ready, you mean that England would not have military establishments organised on the gigantic scale we find obtaining on the Continent, I admit that we should not be; but England would never even dream of undertaking war in that fashion.

Her army must always necessarily be small; she must act with allies, and turn her naval superiority to account."

"But is not, speaking with all deference, is not that view of the case a little vague? If one military proposition has been made more clear than another by recent events it seems to be this, that fleets have little power for offensive movement in Continental warfare, although their defensive power may have improved, and therefore that wars must be settled by forces on land."

"However that may be — and I must say I doubt if the conclusion be well founded, that is, if you draw it from what happened in the Franco-German war—still I hold that we must regard the idea of emulating the armies of the Continent as out of the question."

"I don't say that we could emulate Germany with her million of men, but the population of Great Britain is as large now as that of France was in the revolutionary war; we could therefore maintain as large an army as Napoleon did. The fighting power of a nation—excuse the savagery of the expression—depends on the number of able-bodied men it has."

"You speak as if it would ever be possible to enforce a conscription in England."

"No, I merely meant to say that the men are there if you choose to employ them. Of course you must offer terms sufficient to attract."

Mr Merrifield was silent for a minute; whether considering my proposition, or because he thought it was not worth replying to, I could not tell. I therefore went on—

"Twenty years ago, I admit, the notion of raising a large volunteer army would have seemed chimerical, but we have now actual evidence of what can be done in that way. Look at what happened in America. If ever there was a country of which the impossibility of raising a big army might have been affirmed, it was that. All the difficulties we should encounter in such a task were existent there in a highly intensified degree. The value of labour is even greater there than with us; the sense of independence also, and the novelty of the task. Yet, notwithstanding, the armies they succeeded in raising transcended in numbers even the armies of the Continent.

"Yes, but consider the cause they were fighting for. That was a struggle for a grand national principle, which set the heart of the whole people a-beating—not a mere political quarrel."

"No doubt you must have a sufficient cause. There must be something to arouse the passions of the nation, in order that the passions of the nation may be aroused. But I should hope England would never be drawn into war except on some grave and solemn cause."

"There at least I agree with you," said Mr Merrifield, with emphasis. "But you have overlooked the

enormous, the profligate waste of money those efforts involved, and the tremendous incubus of debt they have laid on the American people."

"The effort was so costly because they were so ill prepared for it; because everything had to be improvised—army, system, officers, arms, everything. If the Northern States had had such a nucleus to begin with as even our moderate establishments, the expense, and every other great feature which gave the struggle its exceptional character, the blunders, the struggle, the time it took, would all have been greatly diminished. And so with us; the sacrifice and the waste of a great war would be avoided just in proportion as we organised beforehand the means of undertaking it vigorously, instead of allowing ourselves to drift into a quarrel, and then embarking on war in half-hearted, insufficient fashion, until the nation, exasperated by disaster, compels its leaders to obey the national voice, and undertake measures adequate to the occasion. But let me explain: I don't anticipate that England would ever be called on for such an effort as the Americans had to put forth, although with our scattered empire it would be difficult to measure the extent of our liabilities. 300,000 or even 200,000 British troops, with the means of filling up casualties, and maintaining the numbers, would suffice to turn the scale in any European war. What I object to is the notion that it would be useful, or even possible, to go into the thing with forty or fifty

thousand—just enough to meet with certain disaster."

"Armies, such as you speak of, may be needed for Continental nations; but the same insular position which makes us, in my opinion, invulnerable, seems equally to render it impossible to attack other nations. It is not merely a case of marching across a frontier: we have to cross the sea; and how are we to do that with a force such as you speak of?"

"I should say the sea, to the nation which has the command of it, would give even less trouble than the land. It is quite as easy to put a regiment on board a steamer as to pack them in a train. Goods of all kinds are certainly carried more easily by sea than land. If America were separated from us by three thousand miles of land instead of by the Atlantic, it would be a *terra incognita* up to the present day. Seas bring countries together instead of keeping them apart. With the command of the Channel and our resources in ships, we could organise a transport-service far superior to any railway system, such as would practically annihilate the distance between us and the seat of war. Then look at the enormous advantage the sea gives, if you have to shift the theatre of operations. Suppose the case, for example, of a war transferred from the north of Germany to Belgium. Instead of moving your supplies after you over hundreds of miles of railway, you land them at the nearest point. In the Peninsular war, as soon as

Wellington had advanced to the Pyrenees, he shifted his base from Portugal to the Bay of Biscay, so that instead of having to drag his supplies over the whole length of Spain and its weary mountains, he was able to keep his army in clover without an effort. The French, under similar circumstances, would probably have been starving, because they had only land carriage."

"Yes, but it strikes me that we have only to look at the expenditure in the Crimean war, where we had what you would no doubt call a mere handful of men to form some notion of the cost of attempting to send out expeditions on the gigantic scale you contemplate. Besides, it is impossible to leave out of sight the fact that these enormous armies are to be made up of volunteer soldiers. No; without enforced service, and that would be opposed to the whole spirit of the national sentiment, large armaments seem impracticable. We must be prepared to act with small numbers, and trust to efficiency for giving them increased value."

"The sort of scheme which I have in view would not, I believe, be really much more costly than our present one, while it ought to give us a sufficient force, although maintaining the voluntary system. Let me observe, by the way, that it is fairly open to question whether volunteer soldiers are really so much, if at all, more expensive than conscripts. In the first place, they are likely to be much better

troops, I suspect, man for man; for although we hear so much about the spirit and intelligence of the German soldiery, it is only reasonable to suppose that there must be a lot of men among them who hate the business, and would be glad to shirk it in any possible way. But the real cost of an army appears not to be so much what is paid for wages, as the loss in national wealth caused by the withdrawal of that amount of labour from productive to non-productive pursuits. The State pays more, no doubt, but not the nation, as it appears to me, except so far as the rate of wages may be higher in one country than the other. Indeed it might be maintained with some reason that the voluntary plan is the cheaper of the two, for the waste in national wealth of keeping up large armies in peace time must in the long-run be prodigious, whereas we only engage our extra hands when we want them. Where our system fails is that we have no adequate provision for getting these extra hands at the critical moment."

"Yes, but your argument assumes that such a provision is practicable."

"That is just what I was coming to. This is the first of the three points of army reform which I think should be aimed at, and which I am so glad to have the opportunity of submitting for your consideration. I believe it is quite possible to get the men if you only set the right way to work. The people of England are warlike enough, but they don't like potter-

ing about, playing at soldiers in peace time; still more they don't like being paid less than the market-rate of wages. But about the military spirit of the country there can surely be no doubt. What other nation could have produced our volunteers? Then see how popular our militia is. You can get any number of men you please for it. And why? Because the men are kept near their own homes, and because they are not embodied during the busy part of the year. And yet this force, so elastic in numbers, and through which you can really get at the youth of the nation, we deliberately throw away for the very purpose it is required, namely, the purpose of war."

"How so? The militia is the main defence of the country."

"A defence in the improbable event of invasion certainly, but if we want to get men for any effort abroad they are lost to us. Now it seems to me that it would not be difficult to provide for getting all the good out of the militia that we now have—its power of indefinite expansion, its popularity, and so forth—without any of the drawbacks now attaching to it, by a simple amalgamation of that force with the regular army. Men don't like serving far away from home, and they don't like serving continuously throughout the year. Well, provided we have a sufficiency of soldiers for ordinary garrison duty and colonial service, why should the army be always

under arms in peace time? What you really need is to know where to put your hand on plenty of men when you want them, and that they should have had a certain amount of preparation and drill, and that all the organisation required for handling the force when it is wanted should be framed and ready. I would say, then, have a real amalgamation between the militia and the line. Carry out the principle of localisation thoroughly, and then you may render the military position of the country really effective, without making it a bit more expensive."

"Is this not in effect what is done already by means of the militia reserve? Are not part of the militia under an obligation to join the regular army if required to do so?"

"We have a militia reserve certainly, but altogether too small in quantity. With our small army it is less even than a mere half-measure to provide only thirty thousand men for its reserve. The reserves ought to be much larger than the embodied army. In fact, the whole militia ought to be available as a reserve. And be it remembered, that just in proportion as you increase your effective reserves, will you be able to reduce the force permanently under arms in peace time."

"Does not the plan of short service lately introduced give you also a large reserve, in addition, from the regular army? At any rate, will it not do so eventually, when the plan has come into full operation?"

"The system assumes that a man shall pass six years in the ranks, and six in the reserve. But deducting men who are allowed to complete their full service with the colours, as will no doubt be largely done, and for casualties, these reserves will never at all approach the embodied army in strength. But the question seems to me to be, why tie your hands with restrictions of this sort? By what is really a very slight change of organisation, we might in effect mobilise the whole militia, and render them available for all the military purposes of the country. I doubt if the liability to serve abroad on emergency will at all interfere with the supply of men. On the contrary, it seems reasonable to expect that this liability, if enforced in war time only, would increase the popularity of the force rather than otherwise, especially if a fair retaining fee be offered."

"You speak of this merging of the militia into the line as a slight measure. You would not find that it would be thought so generally."

"I daresay there would be plenty of men ready to oppose it. Brammy"—Brammy was a diminutive frequently applied to Mr Braham, affectionately by his friends and followers, jestingly by the rest of the world—"we may be sure, would come out with solemn platitudes about the danger of tampering with our great constitutional force; but we could not wish him a less promising bugbear to handle. People will surely be wise enough to see that political danger

nowadays is not to be apprehended from the court or from the army. We have entered on a new state of things, when the danger is not that courts and governments will be too strong, but rather that they will not be strong enough. Besides—I speak with great deference, as becomes a young politician addressing the head of the profession—but, looking at the history of recent times, is it not the case that great measures are just those which are most easy to carry? Take your own case, Mr Merrifield, if I may venture to refer to it. When you were pressing forward your great measures for abolishing entail and reforming the Scotch Presbytery, what a commanding majority you always had at your back! But now when we show hesitation, especially when Baliol (Mr Baliol was one of the Secretaries of State in the Ministry of that day) brings out and withdraws his pottering half-measures, we never seem to be sure of a majority from one day to another."

I suppose Mr Merrifield must have been struck by what I said, for he remained silent when I stopped, a very unusual thing for him to do. Indeed I was quite shocked afterwards, when recalling our conversation, to think how I had been monopolising the larger share of it. However, just now I was emboldened to go on.

"In short, my idea is that we ought to reverse our system. The line and the militia should be amalga-

mated thoroughly together; and moreover, instead of making the militia the reserve for the line, we ought to make the line the reserve for the militia. This is a reform, as I conceive, very urgently needed. In training for any profession, a bad preparation is often worse than no preparation at all. This is certainly the case in the military profession. The drill and training of the sort which a recruit gets in the militia often do him harm rather than good; at any rate this certainly holds good for the officers. The notion Mr Thorowcome set agoing was that service in the militia should be made a qualification for appointment to the line; it is really in no sense a qualification, but rather a disqualification. The only use of the rule is that it acts as a bribe to induce men to take the militia commissions that were going a-begging. But where the men are imperfectly trained and disciplined, there is the need all the greater for experienced officers. The militia, then, I say, should be officered entirely from the line. As it is now organised, it would simply go to pieces on the first strain. But if your commissioned and non-commissioned officers were all soldiers of experience—men who had been trained in the best possible school, the British line—then, in their hands, a raw material would soon be got into shape. This is no doubt one of the secrets of Prussian success. The troops are young, but the officers are ripe soldiers. So it should be with our militia. By giving it a backbone of the veteran ele-

ment of the right sort, of the men who have to command, you would increase its efficiency to an amazing extent.

"There would be another advantage in such a system," I went on to add; "it would furnish an outlet for the line officers, and thus provide for a very serious difficulty. I do not want to defend the purchase system, and it has disappeared never to return; but at any rate purchase gave a very cheap and efficient form of retirement, and how you are to supply its place in this respect no one has yet proposed or thought about proposing. Yet the question will have to be faced some day, and a very tough one it will be found. Now, by making the line a stepping-stone to the militia you would at once have an outlet for a large number of officers. And, observe, you injure no one by so doing, and interfere with no vested rights, for it cannot be said that the rising generation of schoolboys have any vested rights to obtain militia commissions. A commission in the militia is not a livelihood."

"You speak of the difficulty of maintaining a proper flow of promotion, but is it so certain that any such difficulty will arise? Thorowcome, whenever I talked with him about it, before, poor fellow, his health broke down, used to appear very confident that this part of the new scheme would work smoothly enough. I understood him to say that promotion to major would be reached after about eighteen years'

service on the average. That rate would give us field-officers in the prime of life."

"Yes, I remember reading statements to that effect before I went into Parliament; but how Mr Thorowcome proposed to accomplish it I suspect he had not the slightest idea, unless it was by enforcing retirements with pensions, on a gigantic scale of expense. Of course the difficulty will not occur just yet. So long as the sale of commissions by the State goes on, promotion will continue merrily enough; it is the power of realising a capital sum which creates the inducements to retire. But when the present race of officers, who entered under the former system, disappears, and their successors come upon the scene, then the stagnation will arise, and a very great and serious difficulty it will be found."

"But your own regiment has always been a non-purchase one, I understand, yet the difficulty does not seem to have arisen in your case. I have made the acquaintance of several field-officers of artillery during these manœuvres, and they seem to be all very active and efficient men, quite in the prime of life."

"Our promotion has been due mainly to continual augmentations. Five-and-twenty years ago the regiment was comparatively but a small one; then it began to be increased, and the increase has been going on ever since. It was increased before the Crimean war, and of course during that war. Then it was

increased for the Indian mutiny, an increase of at least doubtful necessity, by the way, as regards the officers, for the officers of the Indian artillery were much in excess of the wants of the service, and a large number of them had no batteries with which to serve. However, the increase was made. Then, in 1870, when the panic arose, there was another considerable augmentation,—this, by the way, being almost simultaneous with another reduction of the Indian branch of the artillery, so that officers were being pensioned off on one side and promoted on the other: happily Pendragon and other army reformers did not find it out or there would have been a row. Then, lastly, a lot of officers were appointed to the auxiliary forces—militia and volunteer artillery—and their places filled up. This, I may remark, is a very good illustration how the officering of the militia may be made to stimulate promotion. But thus you will see that the present state of promotion in the artillery is purely artificial. Most of the junior officers now in the regiment have been brought in by augmentations and not in succession to vacancies. It is just the same with the Engineers. The physical efficiency of the Prussian and Italian officers is due to the same cause. Comparatively small armies have been rapidly expanded into large ones. But an end of this augmenting process comes at last. We have certainly reached it, I should say, in my regiment; we have made every one supernumerary

to the fixed establishment who could by straining the construction of the term be deemed to be doing other than regimental duty, and how further relief is to be obtained I am sure I don't know. Already the cry is raised that the subalterns are too old. The same thing, I apprehend, must infallibly happen with the whole of the army by-and-by, and even in a greater degree, because we have an advantage over the infantry in our much greater proportion of field-officers. We have about twice as many colonels and lieutenant-colonels as there is any work for, and they are simply in each other's way; yet, if any reformer were to propose to reduce them, he would be met by the insuperable objection that to do so would make the present bad promotion still worse. Our establishment of senior officers seems in fact to be kept up on its present scale mainly in order to make an outlet for the juniors."

"But is it not the case that what are called the ordnance corps are officered for the most part by men who make a permanent profession of the army, and will not this account for their exceptionally slow promotion?"

"That is no doubt the case, but then the tendency of recent administration seems to be towards assimilating the state of things in the rest of the army with what obtains in our regiments. Pendragon, and his father, and the rest of the army reformers, are all calling out for professional soldiers, as if the

aim and object of all reform should be to produce that class. But, after all, the state of promotion in the artillery and Engineers has been so largely modified by augmentations, as I have endeavoured to explain, that its present state is no index of the normal result of promotion in a professional body which makes the army its permanent occupation. To appreciate properly the tendency of such a state of things you must look at what the regiment was before the augmentations began, when we had captains of fifty-five, or at the state of the Indian army before the mutinies, when it was common to meet with lieutenants of twenty years' service, and three-fourths of the field-officers were past work."

"But here again are you not speaking of a class which looked on the army as their only means of livelihood? Whereas the British army will always be a favourite resort with young men of means, who enter the service as a diversion, to be dropped with the expiration of their youth?"

"That is true. There will always be a large non-professional element in the army, to whom the amount of purchase-money is not a primary object, and who, therefore, will be as ready to retire without that inducement as with it, whenever it suits their convenience. The old Indian army was, no doubt, more purely professional than the British army is ever likely to become, all the officers in it looking to their pay as their only livelihood. But, on the other

hand, they were serving in a bad climate, with an exceptionally high rate of casualties ; and, moreover, what is very important to remember, in the Indian army there was a system of purchase in force which unquestionably stimulated retirements greatly, and since that has been abolished, there has been a complete stagnation. All this, I think, points to the need for providing an outlet for our line officers, and such you would have by officering the militia—or whatever body takes its place—from the line."

"I apprehend the pay of these officers would be a considerable charge?"

"They would have to be paid something, no doubt; but, on the other hand, you would save the present half-pay list, and the present outlay for militia officers, and you would have one charge in lieu, representing, in fact, a system of terminable annuities, for it would not be well that officers should remain an indefinite time with the militia. But this, after all, is only a secondary feature in the scheme. The main point is the complete fusion of the militia with the line, so that it would become a real reserve, available in need for service either at home or abroad."

"Such a scheme would evidently be very costly, to say nothing of other objections which at first sight may not be apparent."

"Each reserve soldier would require a retaining fee, no doubt. But, after all, it is not the pay of the troops which forms the most formidable item of the

estimates. Clothing, food, hospitals, staff, stores, buildings, pension-lists, non-effective services, unemployed officers ; these are the things that mount up. Supposing, for example, that we had 200,000 men in the militia, all available as a reserve, at sixpence a-day while unemployed, the charge would be under two millions a-year, not a very high price to pay for the additional strength it would give us. With such a reserve of trained soldiers, with all the conditions for prompt embodiment already prepared ; above all, with the reserves officered by thoroughly-trained and experienced men ; with a homogeneous force of this description it should certainly be possible to dispense with a part of the regular army now embodied. I believe, then, that the plan would be economical as well as efficient, but the efficiency of it is the point I lay most stress on."

"This, then," said Mr Merrifield, "if I understand you aright, is the first of your three proposals. Now, then, for the second." And so far from being bored with the subject, as I had feared might be the case, he appeared to take quite a lively interest in it, and to be almost eager to pursue it further. I should explain, indeed, that this report of the conversation entirely misrepresents it, so far as it makes me appear to have been the principal speaker and my companion the listener. What really happened was, in fact, quite the reverse ; but although a gratified and, I hope, benefited listener, I have in truth reported in

full only my own share, omitting all the copious illustration and ingenious disquisition which illumined his discourse. Thus the report, although given as if *verbatim*, is in fact merely an abstract of what passed, as will be plain when it is remembered that we had been riding for six or seven miles at a foot pace.

But to resume. "Now," said Mr Merrifield, "for the second point of your scheme."

"Well, my second point is comparatively a minor one, and yet by no means unimportant, for it is at the bottom of a good deal of possible reform."

But what is that rushing past us in the twilight? A horse—a riderless horse—Eva's horse it must be, which goes suddenly by, the reins loose, snorting with excitement, at full gallop across the moor.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CONVERSATION INTERRUPTED.

I SPURRED back in the direction indicated by this apparition, but could not for some time find what I was in search of. There might have been no accident; loose horses were no uncommon phenomena during the manœuvres; but it was more likely there had been an accident, and the few minutes passed in hurrying back across the moor were passed in an agony of suspense which those may appreciate who have ever been in the like situation.

The surface of the moor, although apparently flat, was in reality made up of undulations, and intersected by numerous little gullies, so that although the prospect from the ridges was a wide one, all the lower ground was hid from view; and as in my backward ride ridge after ridge was reached, I strained my eyes in vain through the dim evening light to discover any signs of human beings.

At last, when two or three miles had been traversed, which seemed like a dozen as I sped hither and

thither in every direction, I descried a dark object in the distance, which as I pressed on towards it developed into the object of my search, a dismounted rider holding his horse and bending over a form, my wife, my poor Eva, lying senseless on the ground.

Tom Strickland, for of course it was he, was so absorbed in watching the pale face of his companion that he did not notice my coming till I rode up close. "Thank God you have come!" he cried; "I could not leave her like this—could not tell what to do;" and then explained hurriedly how the accident had happened. They had lost their way in a detour to avoid one of the swamps in which the moor abounded, and were going at a foot pace, for the ground was very rotten, when Eva's horse put his foot into a hole and fell with her. The horse was up and off before Strickland could stop it, but he thought it had rolled partly on its rider, who had lain senseless ever since.

Tom Strickland now set off in search of assistance, while Mr Merrifield, who like myself had been scouring the moor in search of the missing rider, and had now joined us, set off to intercept the provision cart which he had noticed to be making its way homeward in rear of the party, while I remained by my poor sufferer, watching with agony her pallid face and silent breathing, chafing her pretty hands, calling her by name, fearing the worst.

This agony of suspense was happily not long endured. Revived by the contents of a wine-flask I

carried, and which I poured down her throat, Eva suddenly became sensible; could soon sit up, and presently declared herself quite sufficiently recovered to be lifted on to my horse, which I then led up to the pathway, meeting the returning cart just as the advance of evening made it difficult to discern any object in the landscape. By means of the friendly cart the shelter of the farm was soon reached, where we came upon a scene of anxiety and excitement, now happily allayed, as the sufferer turned out to be so much better than the first tidings had represented. A servant had already been despatched across the moor to bring out the Stricklands' family doctor from Stampton; while Tom Strickland, bethinking him that a detachment of troops was encamped at an outpost not many miles off, had gone thither in quest of a surgeon, whom he brought back about midnight. By this time Eva was sound asleep, and Mrs Strickland pronounced strongly against her being disturbed, a verdict which the young assistant-surgeon, who had probably never been called in to attend a lady before, and was wholly inexperienced in the treatment of nerves, evidently considered as a reprieve, accepting in lieu of a consultation a supper and shake-down in the loft prepared for his reception.

Next morning early arrived the doctor from Stampton, a hale old gentleman who called everybody Sir or Ma'am, as the case might be, and whose ruddy face spoke of a life passed in healthy rides over the breezy

downs. This worthy pronounced that no bones were broken, which was indeed already sufficiently obvious, but that the patient had experienced a severe shaking, which also Eva said she knew without being told; finally, he prescribed rest and quiet for a time, and returned homewards, promising to send back a mixture to be taken three times a-day.

Although the accident thus happily proved so much less alarming than it appeared at first sight, it put an end to our share in the manœuvres. Eva expressed a great longing to return, declaring she should be dreadfully in everybody's way, and indeed our present residence was ill suited for an invalid of any sort, even although deriving the support of Mr Dewleppe's mixture. Mrs Strickland wanted to return with her to Stampton Court, leaving me to watch the manœuvres, but of course we would not hear of that. A more convenient plan seemed to be to anticipate our promised visit to Mr Drew and his daughter by a few days—a liberty we might easily venture to take with such old friends; while at Thorpe we should be able to get the benefit of Fergusson's medical attendance for Eva. And accordingly we started off that afternoon in Mrs Strickland's pony-carriage for Thorpe, which was only four miles beyond Stampton, leaving Sybil behind, and arrived there just at dusk, to find Mary working in the garden, and the Squire drinking meditatively a pint of claret in the solitude of his dining-room.

From both we received the kindest welcome. Mary—who had now left Miss Barton's care, and was keeping house for her father—at once took possession of Eva, who was thoroughly knocked up with the drive, carrying her off to her room, and waiting on her for the rest of the evening with a watchful assiduity which seemed like a reproach to my own less careful efforts. This nursing, I may add, was of such persistent kind, and the friends found so much to say to each other, that it involved my sitting up till any hour of the night or morning, before the other young lady could be prevailed on to retire from Eva's room, her only reply to my remonstrance being that she was sure I liked these late hours, as they gave opportunity for an additional cigar.

Fergusson came next day to visit Eva. He pronounced that there was apparently no specific injury from the fall, but that it seemed to have caused a certain amount of shock to the system, for which rest would be the best cure. "Mrs West should keep perfectly quiet for a time. She certainly appears altogether more delicate than she used to be, although it is perhaps difficult just now to form a correct judgment on the point. I should be inclined to suspect that the strain of London life is rather too much for her. I suppose there is a great deal going on in the way of balls, and late hours, and so forth?"

"Yes, there is, a good deal, and my wife often complains of fatigue, and she certainly gets rather wearied

at times. But she enjoys gaiety of this sort so much, that I have not the heart to curtail it, especially as I am a good deal occupied myself, and the life would be dull for her, and her sister too, if they did not go out."

"Well," said Fergusson, "you must make the most of the recess. The holiday on the moor ought to have acted like a tonic but for this accident. Perhaps, taking rest now, she may yet find the benefit of the trip. But you must take care of her, Captain West. I suppose you official men have society engagements which you cannot very well help, but depend on it these late hours and heated rooms are very bad things for delicate young ladies. Mrs West gives me the impression of having done more in that way than is good for her."

So saying the worthy doctor took his departure, leaving me musing over his caution, resolving in my mind more or less vague projects for a more sober scheme of life. If we are always to be Londoners, sooner or later Eva should withdraw from the fatiguing life of the sort led last season. But then Sybil's company was an excuse for this year's racket; it was only fair to give her the full benefit of the London season before she went off to be buried in India.

Upon Sybil's future, indeed, I had just now a consultation with her sister, as she lay on the drawing-room sofa which had been wheeled up towards the window, looking frail and slighter than ever in her

pretty morning robe, a tiny slipper peeping out below the shawl which covered her feet.

"The time is drawing near for Sybil's departure, Eva. Barely two months remain."

"Yes, indeed; how the days do fly! It will be horrible to part with her, won't it? I don't know what I shall do without her."

"I am afraid you will find it lonely, my dear; almost as bad as it was before Sybil came up to join us in town."

"No; you know I didn't mean that, Charlie. Why do you say such cutting things? But, of course, it is only natural that Sybil and I should be fond of each other, living together as we have done almost all our lives."

And Eva looked almost ready to cry.

I recollected at the moment how cheerfully my wife had quitted her mother's home to share mine—the shedding of tears, that eventful morning when we started from Sirmoori on our journey homewards, having been mainly on Mrs Barton's part; and I confess to a pang of remorse and regret, mingled with unworthy jealousy, at thinking that to be my companion no longer satisfied my wife's aspirations. Yet how should it be otherwise?

"Do you think," I said at last, "that your mamma would allow Sybil to stay another year with us before going out to India?"

"Oh," said Eva, clapping her slender hands to-

gether, and almost springing up from the couch, "that would be delightful! Fancy having Syb with us for a whole year more! But," she added with a sigh, "I am sure mamma would never agree to it."

It was curious to notice how we both tacitly assumed that Mrs Barton would be sole referee in the matter, and that "Joe" would count for nothing.

"I don't see why your mamma should not consent. Sybil is full young to go out. If she stayed for another year she would still arrive in India before she was nineteen. Besides, it would really be a pity to stop her music and singing lessons just as she is making such progress. And your mamma need not be at any expense in the matter."

Eva thought that if I put it in that way her mamma might very possibly agree. But would I write instead of her? I should do it so much more clearly.

"There is one thing I ought to say, however. Suppose Sybil's staying ends in her never going out at all?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that supposing Sybil finds a home of her own in England, her mamma might lose her altogether. That would be rather hard on your mamma, although it might be a very satisfactory arrangement for Sybil, and certainly a very pleasant one for us."

"But who are you thinking of?"

"Tom Strickland, of course."

"Captain Strickland?" cried Eva, colouring with surprise.

"Who else could I mean? Why, you must have seen how fascinated he is with your sister. I thought women were so much more observant than men about these things; but even I could not help noticing long ago that he was paying her particular attention."

"I think you are wrong there, Charlie," replied Eva, after a pause.

"I don't think I am," I answered, with an air of superior wisdom. "A man about town, like Strickland, who professes to be used up, and bored with everything, would never come dangling about as he does now, like a tame dog, riding with his sisters day after day, and hanging about the house whenever Sybil is there, if he were not under certain influences. Mrs Strickland is quite delighted to have him so much at home. Whether she would be delighted at such a match for her son is another matter. I suspect she is a very proud woman at heart, with all her gentle manner; but she would be very glad to see him settled, no doubt; and certainly she would have to look far to find a sweeter girl for daughter-in-law, or a prettier either. I only know one."

"You are an old flatterer, Charlie. But although I know you are so much cleverer than I am, I am not sure you are not wrong about this. I am sure Syb hasn't a notion about it. I don't think Captain

Strickland dances with her particularly, more than he does with me, or anybody else."

"Strickland doesn't go about spooning like a boy fresh from school. Somebody didn't dance with you when he was making love. I suppose he is as old as I am. Certainly he must be thirty at least, for he has been over ten years in the service. We old fellows make love in sober fashion, proper to our age. Dull work for the lady in that case—isn't it, Eva?"

Thereon ensued a little flirtation which need not be set down here; for when the jars of household life did not obtrude, wearing away the romance of young marriage with their prosy vexations, we could still play at being lovers.

The result of our conversation was that I went away to write the proposal to my mother-in-law for Sybil's detention. It was the first letter I had written her since our arrival in England, for the family correspondence had been deputed to Eva, and I felt that the proposal I had to make was an ungracious one, since, disguise it as I might, the purport of it was in fact that, having carried off one daughter from her mother, probably never to see her again, I now wanted to detain the other, to relieve the loneliness which the first had to encounter in her married life. I felt, too, that I was to a certain extent writing under false pretences, since, after Eva's opinion, it would plainly have been premature

to communicate any expectations of the possible future in store for her sister.

There would be just time for a reply to this letter to arrive before the date fixed for Sybil's departure for India, but I begged that Mrs Barton would telegraph her decision, which would give us nearly a month's time for preparation, if it should be unfavourable.

CHAPTER XL.

IN WHICH OUR REFORMER FINDS ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY.

A LETTER received from Mrs Barton with the Indian mail the very next day augured badly for the success of our proposal. It was addressed to me, and was the first I had ever received from her. She wrote direct to me, she said, to know what had become of us. It seemed to be months since she had heard of her darling child, and she feared there must be something the matter, for her last letter spoke of her feeling ill, and her continued silence made the writer so terribly anxious as to be quite unfit for any exertion, and unable to take any interest in what was going on around her. The letter was, in fact, one string of lamentations, extending over eight pages of very fine writing, and leaving room for news only merely in the crossing. They were up at Sirmoori for the season, and occupying Rhododendron Lodge as usual. Joe (my father-in-law) had quite taken to the hills, and had come up

for six months too, he found exercise in the hills so good for his health, and the light of a covered racket-court so beneficial for his eyes; but it was a terrible sacrifice, for he was on half allowance all the time, and she really did not know how they should manage to get along and make two ends meet. She hoped dear Sybil would be very economical in her outfit, and get nothing that was not absolutely necessary. They were going to give a ball to the whole society of Sirmoori the night after next, at the Assembly Rooms, and the house was at sixes and sevens, which must be her excuse for this short note. Abbott (husband of Mary her eldest daughter, the Chief Court judge at Mahrattapoor) had been passed over for the Chief Commissionership, a shameful job, and was thinking of throwing up the service. Garrett's (the railway engineer, husband of Emma the second daughter) engagement with the Great Hindoostan Railway was up, and unless he could get into the Government public works he would have to go home. "Six children," said my correspondent, for one had been born since our departure, "and the eldest only five, and not a pice saved." Finch (husband to Harriet the third daughter) had lost five thousand [rupees understood] in tea, and was closer than ever. "Stops darling Fanny's chance of coming up to the hills this season." Captain Morris (native infantry, husband of Sophy the fourth daughter) had been obliged to clear off his debts by borrowing five

thousand [rupees again understood] from the banks, Garrett going security together with Joe, as all the other brothers-in-law had declined to join. Martin (magistrate of Toghlukabad, husband to Fanny the fifth daughter) had been removed from his district for striking a messenger in open court, and made an opium agent instead. "Gives him five hundred a-month more pay, but no prospects; he is very down-hearted about it, poor fellow, but then Martin is such an ambitious man." Mrs Barton, by the way, always called her sons-in-law by their surnames, and I have no doubt spoke of me as West, as if I were a mere point in the family compass. This completed the batch of news, except that an incoherent announcement was added to the effect that Emma was expecting next month, and Sophy in November—the subject of expectation being left unexplained.

Eva was of course very contrite over her mamma's letter, and its implied reproaches for neglecting to write, but pleaded good intentions; she had put off the task from day to day, till she had no idea how much time had passed away. And she looked so penitent and withal so frail as she lay on the sofa, that I had not the heart to scold.

Three days after our arrival at Squire Drew's, who should ride up to the door but Tom Strickland with Sybil. This appeared a sure confirmation of my suspicions, although they were merely the advanced-

guard of an equestrian party, comprising besides themselves Mr and Miss Merrifield and Miss Strickland, all of whom entered the drawing-room before Eva could effect her escape from it. The Minister and his family had returned to Stampton Court on their way northward, and he had thus kindly employed his only leisure day to ride over and inquire after Eva's health, and have a look at the country. The Squire unfortunately was out, going about his fields, and thus lost the opportunity of receiving his distinguished guest; but Mary did the honours of the house with her usual self-possession; and it was interesting to notice the unaffected and modest manner with which the young country girl exchanged greetings with her fashionable visitors; for although the Squire and Mr Strickland were good neighbours, Mary had no personal acquaintance with the Strickland family, and of course Cabinet Ministers and their belongings were quite beyond her experience.

"Yes," said Miss Strickland, "we came away from the moor sooner than was intended. The fact is (lowering her voice), mamma thought Mr Merrifield was beginning to look bored, and between ourselves I think we were all losing our first zeal about the manœuvres: you see we had not your good example any longer. Your interest about them kept us all on good behaviour; but Tom, of course, did nothing but find fault with everything, and criticism like his has a wonderfully cooling effect."

"Yes," observed Miss Merrifield, "Captain Strickland's highest praise was to say that the generals were all a parcel of duffers. That was the elegant phrase he employed."

"No, no, you do me a great injustice," exclaimed Strickland; "I only ventured on a diseriminating but benevolent criticism. I thought the manœuvring admirable. The pickets, speaking generally, faced towards the enemy quite as often as towards their own side, and I don't think the brigadiers on most days lost sight of more than half their brigades. And what could have been better than the skirmishing of the militia? There is an intelligent appreciation by both officers and men of our constitutional force of the spirit of modern tactics which is truly gratifying to witness. Then the Control Department got the men's dinners up very nearly every day without any break-down; and if you consider that they had nearly sixteen thousand men to feed, and were often ten miles from their base of operations, its capacity to stand the strain of a real campaign is sufficiently proved. All this, I would have you to know, Miss Merrifield, is no mean praise, albeit offered by a humble captain of foot."

Here Eva observed that she knew Captain Strickland did not mean what he said; but my attention was diverted by a question from Mr Merrifield, who up to this point had been talking to Mary Drew, and now turning to me observed that he understood the

Thorpe woods were well worth seeing; would I show him the way to the nearest view? And accordingly in a few minutes we were standing together on the little promontory by the summer-house, overlooking the river and commanding the range of woods up and down, the scene of our little picnic of the previous summer, the spot where the Squire and the Doctor discussed over their cigars the coming disruption of all existing institutions, while I sat, half listening, half busied with the building of my castles in the air, which then seemed so airy, albeit of such humble dimensions. Barely a year had passed, and now I stood there again, already in Parliament and part way up the official ladder, and, still more strange, having for my companion him whom the owner of the place denounced as the arch uprooter of all the foundations of the country, the very incarnation of the levelling policy of the age.

CHAPTER XLI.

IN WHICH ANOTHER POINT IS SCORED.

THE interruption caused by Eva's accident, breaking off our conversation on the moor just when I was secure of the Minister's attention for a good hour longer, was unquestionably provoking; for what chance has anybody, much less a subordinate official, of getting an hour's *tête-à-tête* with the Premier during the season, or out of the season either, in ordinary course? But we accept the inevitable with resignation. Here, however, was another unlooked-for opportunity, and that Mr Merrifield felt interested in the subject was evident from his almost immediately bringing the conversation round to it. I had sufficiently explained, he said, what was the first principle of army reform contended for. If he understood me aright, I advocated a complete amalgamation of the militia and the line?

That, I explained, was my proposal. "In this way the efficiency of the militia would be enormously increased,—in fact a real reserve army would be

created—without any diminution of its attractiveness. On the contrary, by giving the militia-man a small retaining fee in the shape of daily pay throughout the year, it should become even a more popular force than it is at present. But to make the militia thoroughly effective, the mode of officering it must undergo a complete change. Instead of militia officers as much inferior to the line in professional acquirements as the men of the one force are to those of the other, you want the very best experience you can command for that service. The popular notions, therefore, about officering the militia by a special class of county amateurs, should be abandoned once and for all. It should be officered wholly by officers who have been trained in the regular army."

"After all, there is no reason why militia officers should not be just as much connected by local association with their regiments under this scheme as they are now. At present, indeed, this local character, which is supposed to be such a valuable feature of "our constitutional force," is purely nominal. You have Scotchmen belonging to Irish regiments, and Englishmen of the north belonging to regiments in the south, all of them living away from the district to which the men belong, and merely going over there for a few days in the year, when the regiment is called out for drill. But if the line be thoroughly localised, as well as the militia; if the young officers on first appointment be gazetted to regiments sta-

tioned in the counties to which they themselves belong: let residence on the spot be enforced from these officers, when they are transferred after service in the line to the reserve or militia battalions; and then the local character of the militia will be much more distinctly stamped on it than it is now. The militia battalions would indeed eventually be no longer commanded by lord-lieutenants of counties as at present; but, after all, are not these functionaries in a somewhat false position, if their regiments should come to be embodied and themselves placed under plain lieutenant-colonels of the line?"

Mr Merrifield here turned the conversation to the other points of reform I had referred to as having in view, and asked me to explain them.

I replied that I had not quite exhausted my views about the reserve forces. It would increase their efficiency enormously, if instead of all the young reserve soldiers being organised as militia, a part were attached to the regular army. "At present the only reserve of regulars consists of a small number of old soldiers who have gone through several years' continuous duty. Let us have also a reserve of young soldiers, to be put under training for a few months, and then relegated to civil life, to be called out only if wanted. Offer a somewhat higher retaining fee than what is to be given to the militia, and there should be no difficulty in obtaining a force of this kind sufficient to bring up our skele-

ton line battalions in war time to a reasonable strength."

But there was not time to pursue this subject further, and fearing to exhaust the patience of my listener, I passed on to the next of my three points; a comparatively minor one, I said, and yet important enough in its way; and while my first proposal had no doubt already appeared before the public in one form or another, this one seemed not to have presented itself to any one.

"It is this. Disguise it how you may, the course of all recent legislation for the army has been to do away with the advantages and the stimulus furnished by money, to keep out blockheads, and to make the army more of a regular profession. The result of this is that men (I mean of course officers) stick to the profession longer. The sumptuary regulations lately proposed have the same effect. In proportion as extravagance of living is repressed will the casualties from young fellows running into debt be diminished. This, by the way, is one sure result of abolishing purchase. When there are no more commissions to be sold, the same temptations will no longer be held out to run into debt. The greater sobriety of living has also the effect of retarding promotion. When I first went to India the great change in this respect was just about being manifested. Intemperance had gone out of fashion. But before my time the mortality among the regiments in India from this cause

and from carelessness of living generally used to be something frightful. It had the effect, however, of keeping up a constant stream of promotion. Well, the effect of all these changes combined—the abolition of purchase, the more professional character of the officers, and the reduced mortality among them—is that promotion will tend to become much slower. We shall probably have a state of things throughout the army generally (except, perhaps, among a few of the fashionable regiments officered by men of wealth), such as there used to be in the Artillery and Engineers before the effect of seniority was disguised by constant augmentations, and as there was in the Prussian army before it underwent the immense augmentation which transformed it into the great army of Europe. And then what will have to be done? The cry will be raised for relieving the stagnation by liberal pensions, or bonuses to induce some of the younger officers to get out of the way, such as were given lately to my regiment, when a number of men who had been invited to compete for appointments and educated mainly at the public cost, were bribed to leave it a few years afterwards when in the prime of efficiency. But think what the cost of repeating this would be, if applied to the whole army! And after all, pensions will not do what is wanted. They failed signally in the Indian army, where, notwithstanding the pensions, and the bad climate, and the exile, the officers used to be much too old for their work,

and it was common, as I observed the other day, to meet with subalterns of forty and captains of fifty."

"What, then, is your remedy for this impending evil?"

"I think we should apply *the principle of honour*. Let me explain what I mean. There are two ways of remunerating public servants; one is by money alone, the other is by money combined with distinction. Now the limit of pay is practically soon reached; but honorary distinction is an inexhaustible mine if only worked properly. If it is a mark of distinction to be a captain or a major, then you will find plenty of men willing to serve in those grades for very small pay; if you depreciate the rank, you will have to offer some other consideration. Now, instead of acting on this principle, the tendency of all recent administration has been to go on cheapening military rank till it is not worth having, and we shall very soon have military officers leaving their titles out of their cards as a protest against the abuse. Look at the reckless way in which what is called "relative rank" is given. Doctors, veterinary surgeons, paymasters, purveyors of food, custodians of stores, everybody takes rank nowadays over the captains and lieutenants; in fact, the combatant officers are the only men who have no rank worth speaking of. Then, again, see how the country swarms with militia and volunteer officers, obese, middle-aged gentlemen, going about as majors and colonels,

whose military qualifications often begin and end with their titles."

"But if men are doing the duty of officers with the militia and volunteers, how are you to help designating them by their distinguishing titles?"

"It depends upon what is the idea that you wish to convey by a title. If the title of captain is to be given to anybody who turns out two or three times a-year for a little exercise with the indefinite muster that does duty for a volunteer company; or to another who vegetates somewhere in the country, and abandons domestic retirement every two or three years for a bout of drill with a militia regiment collected in another part of the kingdom,—if functions of this kind are to be denoted by the style of captain or colonel, then no doubt the present system is a right one. But if military rank is to signify, as it used to do, something coupled with obligation to be sent on instant service to any part of the world, and to give up one's life whenever required to do so, then it seems to me these titles have been wantonly misapplied. The honorary promotion given on promotion is another unwise measure in my opinion. Every officer who, on retirement, is entitled by length of service to a pension, is also advanced to a step of honorary rank. This accounts for the country being so brimful of generals. A general nowadays does not mean a man who has fulfilled the duties of a general, or who may have to fulfil them hereafter,

—it means somebody who has once been a colonel. The result of this reckless misapplication of military rank is that the titles held by the combatant grades have become thoroughly depreciated, and a cheap but efficient mode of remunerating the officers and the army has been entirely sacrificed."

"But are not these honorary titles given as an inducement to men to retire, and do they not thus tend to accelerate promotion and prevent that stagnation which you admit to be one of the great difficulties to be contended against?"

"Honorary rank may, no doubt, act as an inducement, but I think it does more harm in one way than good in the other. Besides, when men are entitled to retiring pensions, you may enforce retirements by suitable rules to any extent you think proper, and therefore it is not necessary to hold out special inducements for the purpose. For my own part, I think the whole system of promotion to the rank of general officer, even on the active list, calls for reform. The list is much too large, and the promotion to it altogether too indiscriminate. Of all grades, this is the one to which a claim to promotion by mere seniority should least be recognised. But this is a minor blemish compared with what goes on in the Indian army, where a state of things has lately arisen which, in a military point of view, is simply nothing short of scandalous."

As I made this reference to the Indian army, I

trembled for the continuance of the conversation, knowing by experience that the subject is one which people generally, and members of the Government in particular, can never be got to attend to. If talking with Lord Stowe, I used to observe that at the very mention of India—just as at the word "accounts"—his eyes assumed a dreamy aspect, as if he were looking at a wall a hundred miles behind me, or were thinking of his dear Sophia, and the rest of his girls in Switzerland. When I opened the subject of India to Bracton one day, he cut me short by saying, "My dear fellow, the Sandwich Islands ain't under this department." I thought indeed I had found a congenial spirit in Mr Sinnick, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for when one night, while sitting next him on the Treasury bench, I made some allusion to the needless burden on the finances of certain army arrangements, he pricked up his ears; but on my going on to explain what I meant, he said, "Oh, if it's only the Indian Army they are wasting money upon, it doesn't matter; we don't pay for it;" and thereon, folding his arms, resumed his peaceful slumber. But Mr Merrifield had the power of true genius in his capacity for going into details as well as in mastering principles—a very rare power among statesmen, as among the rest of the world. And in the present case, to my great delight, he expressed an interest to hear what I had to say about the Indian army, adding that he had often

felt a curiosity to learn something of its organisation.

Thereon I explained the system of the new Indian Staff Corps, with the preposterous conditions involved. How, under the old system, the objectionable state of things,—under which half the regimental officers of the Indian army were detached from their regiments in various civil capacities for indefinite periods often extending over a lifetime, was disguised under the nominal condition that such officers were available to join their regiments if required to do so, although as a matter of fact they never were required, or if they had been, their occupations for ten or twenty or thirty years as magistrates, or bridge-builders, or superintendents of government farms, or clothing agents, would have quite unfitted them to resume regimental duty. That thus the Indian army, although a homogeneous body of regimental officers, was divided in effect into two distinct parts, the real soldiers and the nominal ones, all, however, getting their promotion by seniority in the same way. How this state of things, which more than anything else had tended to demoralise the army, had now been replaced by a still more extravagant misuse of military rank and promotion. For, whereas every officer used before to belong nominally to some specific regiment, in virtue of which he obtained his promotion from time to time, even this semblance of military obligation had now been given up, and a

gigantic sham, called the Indian Staff Corps, had been created, which had nothing to do with the staff, or any corps or military body whatever, but was simply a clumsy vehicle for giving military rank to a great body of civil *employés*, whose connection with the army began and ended with this rank, and who were employed as magistrates, judges, surveyors, road-makers, book-keepers, and in all the other multifarious duties which make up Indian administration. "In this country," I said, "a major or colonel, if not belonging to the regular army, still, if he belongs to the militia or volunteers, has military obligations of some sort, however slight; but an Indian staff-corps officer is very possibly of a sort that under no conceivable circumstances can ever be employed as a soldier. He is simply a person who, in virtue of having entered the army as a youngster, and obtained some appointment in India, henceforward gives up all military duty whatsoever, but is nevertheless entitled to promotion at stated intervals to the rank (rank only, his pay does not depend on his rank, but on the nature of his civil duty; he may be making laws, or he may be making bricks, and is paid accordingly) of captain, major, and so on, throughout the different grades, till eventually he becomes a general officer. Thus by-and-by Cheltenham and Bayswater will swarm with these generals, who have never so much as commanded a company —men who have not been on parade for thirty years,

and who some of them could not ride a mile to save their lives. Never was there such a prostitution of military rank before.

"It is not to be supposed," I continued, "that Lord Carteret had any distinct notion of what he was doing when he established these Indian staff corps. His object was apparently to create a cheap form of civil service, by paying men partly in rank instead of wholly in money; but that the thing should have been tolerated so long is incomprehensible. The only reason can be that people in this country will not be at the trouble of understanding Indian affairs of any kind.

"The result," I went on to say, "is that the Indian army, as regards a large number of its officers, is a thoroughly unmilitary body. It is, in fact, living on the reputation of a small part of it, and of a few distinguished members, while India itself is a British Algeria, in which the natural advantages for developing military qualities have made us indifferent to the need for cultivating artificial ones. A considerable part of that army is nothing better than a very badly armed militia, and the whole wants reform. But however that may be, there can be no doubt about the non-military character of the colonel-accountants and judges. Living, as many of them do, in out-of-the-way places, where they never see a soldier from one year's end to the other, they have not even the military experience to be got by a

volunteer review at Brighton. This might be merely a negative evil, except that the system out of which it arises cheapens military rank in the British army as well. What we have to do, I conceive, is to make the honourable military title more in estimation than ever. No man should be called a general who has not actually exercised a general's command, and all nominal titles and honorary ranks should be abolished."

"You have certainly made out a strong case for doing so," observed the Minister, when I came to the end of my harangue, over which I am afraid I became quite excited.

"I am glad you think so. For similar reasons I think the conversion of the first captains of my regiment into majors was a mistake. Our officers were naturally tired of being only captains, and no wonder, for a captain nowadays is a mere nobody, especially in India, where nearly half the regiment is serving; but the proper remedy for that was to make the captain a big man, not to depress him still more, as has been the effect of this new artillery organisation."

"In fact, a process of levelling up?"

"Precisely so. In this love of titles inherent in mankind you have, I think, a mine that may be worked to any extent. Hitherto this coinage of honour has been undergoing continual degradation, one branch of the service after another getting some sop thrown to it in the way of increased promotion,

or relative rank, or honorary rank, and so on, till military grades have come to be something quite different to what they used to be thirty or forty years ago. Our policy should now be, I conceive, to work back again. Restore the purity of the coinage; make military rank something worth having, and you may save a great deal of what will otherwise have to be laid out in pay and pensions."

"There seems a good deal of force in what you say," observed Mr Merrifield, "but there appears another side also to the question. If your plan would have the effect you appear to expect from it, of making military rank a thing more in estimation than before, may it not also operate to render men less unwilling than they are at present to leave the army, and so create the very evil to be guarded against of blocking up promotion, which is one of the objections brought against the abolition of purchase?"

"That might certainly be a tendency of such a policy, but I think it could be prevented by suitable arrangements. After all, however, this matter of promotion is merely a minor point as compared with the scheme I mentioned the other day, for obtaining the army which has to be officered. And another measure of army reform still more needed involves also a much more radical change. This I have not yet mentioned."

"True, I am anxious to hear what that is, for you

have done no more than mysteriously allude to it so far. But bless me," added Mr Merrifield, looking at his watch, "I had no idea how late it was. We shall never be back at Stampton Court in time for dinner, unless we hurry back."

It was indeed getting late, our conversation having been a very protracted one. For, as I have before explained, the reports given here are no more than brief abstracts of what really passed. In fact, I have no more done justice to my companion's share in the conversation, edifying and delightful though it was to listen to, than did the Roman historians detail fully what took place at Carthage. The result, however, of all the digressions and disquisitions into which we branched off, and which I have perforce omitted to repeat, was, that notwithstanding the two opportunities afforded for speaking freely, opportunities such as might never occur again, Mr Merrifield rode back with his party to Stampton before I had entered into the branch of my subject which I thought would have had for him the greatest interest.

"Well," said Mary Drew, after her distinguished visitors had ridden away, "I am so glad to have spoken to a real live Prime Minister. Of course I knew that he must be a human being, but it seems almost impossible to think that it is not some delusion. I always fancied a great orator like Mr Merrifield must be something like the statue of Lord

Chatham, which I saw in the Houses of Parliament when papa took me to London. I don't mean, of course, with any robes on, for I know you gentlemen of the House of Commons don't wear them, but standing majestically with one arm perpetually stretched out, defying Mr Braham and everybody else. It was difficult to fancy it could be the same person who makes those great speeches and governs the whole country, that was sitting here like an ordinary mortal, taking five o'clock tea, and talking so unaffectedly to us as if we were just as good as himself."

"Mr Merrifield is such a dear old man," said a languid voice from the sofa cushions.

"Old!" cried Mary; "the idea of connecting age with such a person! It seemed to me when he was talking as if I were listening to some one who might be of any age."

"Well, my dear, but he *is* old. Look how bald he is, ever so much balder than Lord Stowe, and Lord Stowe says himself that he is quite an old man, and I am sure he must be, for Lady Sophia is a regular old maid. She must be thirty if she is a day."

"Eva has been spoilt by all the intellectual society she has been mixing with in London," replied her friend. "I suppose if you get accustomed to the splendour of these shining lights you may find the use of your eyes in time, as Eva appears to have done already; but when they come to visit us simple

country folk, we are so dazzled that we have no sight for human blemishes. I should no more have thought about whether one of these godlike creatures was old or young, than an ancient Greek would have thought about asking the age of Apollo or Venus, if he fancied he saw the incarnation of those deities."

"Do you include Lord Stowe in your pantheon of godlike creatures, Mary?" asked Eva's husband. "If you had seen him on the moor the other day with his comfortable worsted stockings and high shirt-collar and a plate of cold chicken on his lap, or at one of our board meetings trying to look wise over an item in the army estimates, you would hardly have recognised the superhuman elements in his organism."

"Oh, Lord Stowe is different, of course, because I have been accustomed to see him walking about Leatherby ever since I can remember. I suppose familiarity disillusions one. I daresay if we had never seen you till after you had made your speeches and become such a great man, we should have been dreadfully afraid of you too; but now I can never fancy that you are really a Minister."

"Not quite a Minister, Mary. The gradations of the Government officials are very well marked, I can assure you, and there is almost as much difference between a Cabinet Minister and an understrapper like myself as there is between a captain and a corporal. A Paymaster-General is a very small item in the official hierarchy, isn't he, Eva?"

"My dear Charlie, as if it were any good asking me! I never shall understand all these distinctions. You know you laughed at me the other day, because I asked how old Admiral Mayne Toppe could be a Lord of the Admiralty when he wasn't a lord at all. It seems to me that the only difference between Cabinet Ministers and other people is that they talk such prosy stuff."

"Prosy, Eva?" said Mary; "I am sure you can't say that Mr Merrifield was prosy this afternoon. He seemed to be delightful. I could have gone on listening for ever."

"Oh yes, Mr Merrifield can make himself very pleasant; and you see to-day we were only a lot of girls to talk to. But you should have heard him and Charlie and Mr Strickland after dinner in the cottage. There was no drawing-room out on the moor, you know, so we all sat together after dinner till it was time to go to bed; and they used to go on about politics and taxation and organisation, and stuff of that sort, till I could hardly help falling asleep." And Eva spoke almost crossly, as if something had vexed her.

CHAPTER XLII.

RETURNS OF THE KILLED AND WOUNDED.

A FEW days of rest and quiet at Squire Drew's, under his daughter's watchful nursing and care, sufficed to restore my little wife from the immediate effects of her fall, and we now moved on to Leatherby (again thrown into a state of wild excitement by the passage through of the troops on their return from the manœuvres), where I left her and Sybil for a time in charge of Aunt Emily, while I returned to my official duties in town. For both Bracton and Tregart claimed their holiday; Lord Stowe had gone off to join Lady Sophia and the rest of his girls in Switzerland; and some one was wanted to represent the department and sign the routine letters that issued from the office.

"Next time you come you will be quite well and strong, dear," said our young hostess to Eva at parting; "and then we shall be able to go about in the woods together, and have plenty of music of an evening. But there would have been no use in try-

ing to play on this old piano; it is a regular tin kettle. However, by the time you pay your real visit, papa will have got me the new one."

"We must see how the crops turn out, my dear," said the Squire, "before we talk about buying pianos. Some of the potatoes down in the eight-acre look very queer; and as for corn, it is so down this year, but for these troops coming here we should not have been able to get a price for it at all. As lief give it to the pigs as take it into Leatherby market nowadays."

"A terrible state of things," said Mary, gravely; "and there was a great bough of an apple-tree broken off in that gale the other day. Papa will have to go into the Gazette if this sort of thing lasts."

"It's all very well to laugh, Miss," rejoined the Squire, ruefully, but his eye twinkling behind his spectacles; "but these are hard times for us poor farmers. We have never had a really good year since forty-six, and things grow worse and worse."

"You dear old papa, to hear you talk one might suppose you lived by what you can make out of the home-farm. But it is no use to pretend to be poor, because everybody knows that you are rolling in money. Anyhow, the piano is a promise; but there are ever so many things to be got besides, to make the house look decent before the Wests pay us their next visit, so you will have to spend I don't know how much money."

And so saying, Mary patted her father's cheek with her hands and gave him a kiss.

"And you shall choose the piano yourself when you come to us in the spring, Mary dear."

"Ah, well," said the Squire, smiling, "it is well I have only one extravagant child instead of half-a-dozen. We must see how the cider turns out."

Although temporarily in charge of the department, there was not at this time much business for any one to do, and the dead dulness of London in early October was only faintly disturbed by a discussion got up in the newspapers on the question whether or not the late manœuvres had been a success. The accounts furnished at the time had hardly settled the point conclusively. The special correspondent of the *Dial* had indeed supplied a good many dozen columns of his usual graphic descriptions, in which there was a great deal about the glinting of steel cuirasses; how Colonel Leitwayte galloped at the head of his regiment as if riding to hounds; how the Guards marched past like a wall; how Old Nick's Brigade (a playful appellation bestowed on the London Attorney Volunteers) were very well received by the public as they passed the saluting-flag; and how the various foreign officers collectively gave the distinguished correspondent their confidential opinion about the whole affair. But it was not all mere word-painting of this high character. There was also criticism. The correspondent of the *Dial* denounced boots and breeches,

while he of the *Eclectic* wanted to know why gaiters were not served out. One critic said the cavalry were made no use of, another that they were shamefully overworked; one denounced the overplus of baggage, another inquired indignantly why spare flannel waistcoats and greatcoats were not carried for the men to put on when wet. One man said the cavalry were undersized, another that the horses were overweighted. One oracle said we ought to copy the Prussians, and have nothing but cuirassiers and uhlans; another that heavy dragoons were obsolete, and that our cavalry ought to be made up of men of the jockey class, riding on hunting-saddles, and with no calves to speak of. And so on. The criticisms on the manœuvres were, of course, still more precise and unanimous. The troops were too slow—and too quick; the cavalry was too far ahead —and was made no use of; a general who halted for a day was denounced for wasting precious time; another who marched twenty miles was hauled up for overworking the soldiers, several of whom assured our correspondent personally that they were very tired; the militia were even better disciplined than the regulars; the militia were a lot of roughs. And so on. These criticisms, if not unanimous, being delivered with the undoubting tone of real infallibility, brought home the manœuvres to every Englishman's breakfast-table in thoroughly vivid fashion, although possibly leaving him somewhat hazy as to the general

results; while the unfortunate generals who were the principal victims of the operation, bewildered by the conflicting advice showered on them, and stung by the minute and detailed criticisms to which every movement, almost every look, was exposed, vowed they would never again undertake the responsibilities of a command in peace time. But no man can run up four columns of type a-day about nothing, unless he goes into details.

A correspondence which had more immediate interest for our establishment was that set agoing, I suspect, by my impulsive young friend O'Hagan, the member for North Cork, who, burning with impatience to denounce the shortcomings of the Control Department, could not wait the assembly of "pahrlemint" as he called it, but fired off a pathetic letter to the *Dial*, which, under the signature of "A wandering M.P.," recounted how the gallant three hundred narrowly escaped starving at Minton, and ended by saying that the writer denounced the whole proceeding. Nor was it difficult to detect in the replies of "A veteran officer" the involved and hazy style of my friend Burley, who, passing by the question whether or not the Control Department had succeeded in feeding the handful of troops engaged on the downs, cited two columns of figures to show that the department, since the present head had been in charge of it, had effected a saving in the public expenditure of £77,082, 15s. 4d., a calculation in-

geniously made out by adding up all the items of the army estimates in which there had been a reduction, and leaving out all those in which there had been an increase. By aid of these diversions, and by dint of calling for returns and tabular statements on every possible subject that bore directly or indirectly on the manœuvres, the office managed to pass the time very agreeably until the autumn was well advanced, and the members of the Government began to return to town. There was one return in particular, concocted by the joint efforts of Trubbell Soame, Meddell, and M'Muddell, under Burley's general superintendence, and to compile which the whole Movable-Store-Examination and Daily-Price-Current Branches were taken off their proper duties for a fortnight, and which drove the executive part of the Control Department nearly crazy in the supply of data for compiling it. This little document, which gave in a tabular form all statistics relating to the supply of food during the manœuvres, had a hundred and twenty columns one way, and a hundred and eighty-four the other, and measured seven feet long by eight feet six wide; and many a happy hour did Burley spend over it, lying full length on the floor, pencil and note-book in hand, much as Napoleon was supposed to study his maps before entering on a campaign. And the result was worth the labour. For the general average which Burley complied from the chart brought out the important facts that .827 per

cent of the carriage engaged at the manœuvres did not break down; that .57 per cent of the troops had received their rations regularly; that .31 per cent received their rations without their forage; .18 per cent received forage but no rations; and only .019 per cent got neither one nor the other. These facts, it was held by the department, conclusively proved the efficiency of the system, regard being had to the novel character of the operations and the difficulties of the ground, and were deemed to constitute abundant evidence of the elasticity of the system, and a crushing reply to all cavillers. This last remark was meant for a hit at the P.G., as the official was styled who held the office I had now the honour to fill.

However, while the press were engaged in a lively discussion of these interesting figures, public attention was suddenly diverted by a thrilling triple murder in Bermondsey; where an unfortunate weaver under the influence of *delirium tremens* killed his grandmother and two aunts, and then tried to kill himself,—so that the interest about the manœuvres gradually died away. An attempt was indeed made to revive it at the Royal Army and Navy Institute, where Burley read a paper, introducing to the profession the new diversion called the "Brod-und-Fleisch Spiel." This novel and ingenious game was played with a large map, and a box of tin toys representing the waggons of two opposing armies,

which were manipulated by two officers of the Control Department, the object being to practise them in furnishing supplies to the army, while a certain amount of dice-throwing was introduced to represent the chances of war. Thus, if one side threw sixes, that stood for "all the mills in the enemy's country blown up," obliging the opposing controller to bring up all his flour from the rear; fives counted for "bad roads," when one-fifth of the waggons were withdrawn as broken down,—and so on. The umpire decided what difference this loss would make in the available supply of provisions; and for every period of twenty-four hours passed by the troops without food a thousand metallic warriors were struck off the roll. The side which, after the end of a certain time, had the largest number of tin survivors, was deemed to have won the game. Burley was of opinion that by this ingenious diversion a controller might be trained up to any pitch of efficiency, without any money being wasted in actual practice; and the game was thought so highly of that it was determined to make it one of the subjects to be taken up at the competitive examination for admission to the department; whereupon all the cramming masters who prepared candidates for this test advertised that the pupils at their establishment would be provided with boxes of the Brod-und-Fleisch Spiel free of charge.

While the S. G. and his branch were engaged in

these enlivening pursuits, my part of the office was occupied in the humble but perhaps more congenial duty of auditing the accounts of the manœuvre disbursements; and O'Verduit, the most rising official among the P. G.'s, feeling, perhaps, that we had been rather left out in the cold all this time, was unusually active in his audits, ferreting out irregularities right and left, and coming down in splendid style on the men who had made emergent disbursements without going through the regular forms. Rather a neat thing in this way was the disallowance of the charge for mending a cart at a village smithy, instead of sending it to the nearest field depot. The retrenched officer asked how could the cart be sent on when it had broken down; but as O'V. truly observed, it was no business of our department to answer questions—all we had to do was to ask them; and this little stroke was much relished on our side of the office, because the offending party belonged to the S. G. Branch, which had condoned the offence. Another ingenious retrenchment was that against an officer for his second-class fare on a railway journey. In vain did the officer protest that his journey was made under proper authority. That was not the point: our objection was, that there was no authority to travel second-class; if he travelled at all, he should have gone first-class. However, we gave in eventually. But perhaps the neatest case of all was that of the cask of rum which, having been damaged by

an upset on the moor, was sold by auction at the nearest village. The officer concerned got into a scrape, in the first instance, for not having collected the fluid in spare casks, and sent it back to London, where, as Meddell and Trubbell Soame both remarked in their minutes on the subject, there would have been a much better market for the article. But that was an administrative question with which we had no concern. The point to which our branch took exception was, that there was no voucher for the receipt of the money realised by the sale. Not quite understanding myself where the difficulty lay, when the case came before me I sent for Rueteen the head-clerk.

"Mr Rueteen, I don't quite see the force of your objection to this item?"

"There are two objections, sir," said Mr Rueteen; "in the first place, Mr Commissary Twozellus has laid himself open to animadversion by receiving this money without authority; but I waive that: the point I take exception to is, that there is no sufficient evidence of receipt of the money to satisfy the Audit Department."

"But he acknowledges the receipt of the money in his own cash account! What better evidence can you possibly want! Surely he would not have done so if he had not really got it?"

"It has always been held by the Audit Department," said Mr Rueteen, solemnly, "and I hold the

principle to be a thoroughly sound one, that when money is received on behalf of the Secretary of State, there should be at least one independent voucher in support of the item."

"But what better voucher can you possibly have than the receiving officer's own acknowledgment for the money?"

"But the radical principles of audit, sir, assume that there should be a correspondence of independent vouchers."

"Precisely so; and if an officer pays money away, of course you require the receipt of the party who has been paid; but you can't expect the buyer in this case to surrender the receipt which has been supplied to him."

Mr Rueteen was silent for a minute, looking mild, but firm, as much as to say, "Your position here requires that I should treat you with respect, but I am aware that it is hopeless to make you understand these things; you are altogether too young and inexperienced." I went on.

"It sems to be overlooked, Mr Rueteen, that the Commissary is in fact his own auditor in this case. For if he had not reported the sale of the rum, we should have known nothing about it. It seems rather hard upon him, that when we trust him so far, we should not take his word when he says he has received the money. Suppose he had omitted to credit the sales altogether, we should have been

none the wiser. What would you have done then?"

"The matter would possibly in that case have not come before us at all," replied my venerable friend; "but I have always held, and still do hold, that when money is received on behalf of the Secretary of State, an independent voucher should be recorded in proof of the transaction."

Eventually, if I recollect rightly, this little case was amicably adjusted; but I felt that I had lost ground in Mr Rueteen's estimation, as in that of the office generally, by my laxity of sentiments.

But my attention was just now temporarily diverted from these interesting matters by more mundane affairs. It only wanted a couple of weeks to the time fixed for Sybil's departure, when the decisive letter arrived which was to determine whether she might stay with us or must go out to India; for of course Mrs Barton did not telegraph her reply to our application, although she wrote by return of post. The reply was what I expected. Her mother and "Joe" were longing to see their dear child, whose coming had already been delayed a year longer than usual, all her sisters having gone out when they were eighteen. Moreover, it would be better to pay for the passage while the money was to be got, for there was no saying where it was to come from by-and-by, now that Joe insisted on taking leave to the hills every season, and sacrificing half his salary; so

she enclosed a remittance for the passage-money, and begged that I would arrange to send darling Sybil out by the first steamer for which an escort could be found.

It so happened that our Kissengen acquaintance, Mrs Featherstone, was about to start in a fortnight, accompanying her husband back to India on the expiration of his furlough, with her two daughters. For the last ten years the family had been divided, Mrs Featherstone presiding over the household at Brighton, and her husband furnishing from India the remittances which kept the establishment going, and renewing his acquaintance with the members of it by an occasional run home. Latterly they had become quite united again, Mr Featherstone having been enjoying a two years' furlough, on the expiration of which it had been arranged that his wife and daughters should return with him to India, the house in Brighton being disposed of, and the boys placed in charge of a gentleman and his wife who make the care of Indian children their peculiar study. The voyagers now kindly proposed that Sybil should join their party at Southampton, whither I accompanied her on the day fixed for the sailing of the steamer.

The same steamer carried back my friend Brodie of the Public Works service, accompanied by his sister. Miss Brodie, whose magnificent head of hair (which had attained a prodigious development since our last meeting) gave her a quite juvenile appear-

ance, explained to us that she had been persuaded by Jamie into paying India a short visit, but she was sure nothing would induce her to stop for more than a year in such a horrid country; she had certainly made sufficient provision for her brief visit in the shape of a piano, and a general outfit comprised in about ten large packing-cases. Poor Mrs Brodie, with whom I travelled back to town, for her part evidently regarded the parting as a final one; but she was full of her son's goodness and liberality, and her hopes for a happy future for Jessie in India. There was no opening for girls in their quiet Scottish home, she said; the little town was full of old maids already. She was old herself; and although it would be lonely work living without her dear girl, better so than that her girl should be left alone in the world after she was gone. Thus spake the poor old lady, sorrowful but resigned, as I handed her into the cab which conveyed her to the lodgings where she was to pass the night, going down the next morning to her native Scottish village, to spend there the rest of her solitary days, finding peace of mind in the consciousness of self-sacrifice and the prosperity of her two children.

Eva came up to town with Sybil for the last fortnight which the latter had to spend in England, and the next day after their arrival Tom Strickland paid them a long visit; and when I came home from office, the three were engaged in singing trios—the

gentleman playing the accompaniment, and the sisters standing one on each side of the piano—an amusement resumed after dinner, which, by the way, was not more than half an hour late on this occasion. There must be something in this, I thought. A man like Strickland, who professes to be in a state of perpetual boredom in every sort of society, would never show himself so ready to devote a whole evening to a young lady if there was not special attraction. Not that his manner expressed any particular tenderness of feeling, and he did not appear to be more attentive to one sister than the other; but that might be easily explained. A man like Strickland, bordering on middle age, would not show his feelings like younger fellows. The only thing that distinctly bore on the point was a remark he threw out during dinner, that he would like to go to India, only that Guardsmen were practically prevented from exchanging. And as I sat in a corner while the music was renewed after dinner, I speculated on the course things would take if he did actually make Sybil an offer. Should I be justified in detaining her in England, pending consent of her parents to the marriage? No; it would clearly be better in such case that he should follow her to India, and bring his bride back. This would be a test of the strength of his feelings. It would be strange, too, if a man of his age and temperament were caught by a young girl; for Sybil, although so tall and womanly-looking, was still almost a child in

mind. To this speculation succeeded doubts about the suitability of such a marriage. Good-tempered and good-natured as were both Strickland and my sister-in-law, there was hardly any other point of affinity between this hard-headed sarcastic man of the world and the simple-minded Sybil.

But all these speculations proved baseless; for although Strickland, before leaving, made an appointment to escort the ladies the next day to the City, and he paid frequent visits to the house during the fortnight that Sybil stayed with us, no declaration was made, and, indeed, no parting ever came off, for he was summoned to a court-martial at Windsor a day or two before Eva and I started for Southampton. Nor could I guess from her manner what her feelings were in the matter. The poor child wept bitterly when she left Leatherby, before coming to town, at parting with her aunts; and the two sisters took leave of each other in the house by Queen's Gate with mutual tears; but by the time we reached Southampton she had recovered from her sorrow, and in the bustle of embarkation on the steamer's crowded deck, amid the excitement of the scene and greetings from her friends, she seemed quite in high spirits. Poor child! another home awaited her beyond the sea, and the unknown and indefinite future lay before her, a prospect for the young always full of charms.

CHAPTER XLIII.

VIRTUE REWARDED.

It was not many weeks after Sybil's departure, and our establishment in Pall Mall was peacefully engaged in its usual routine, undisturbed save by the mild periodic excitement of framing the annual estimates, while I regarded my own state of mind with a sort of lazy wonder, as I found myself gradually subsiding into an easy-going official hack, the grand visions of my day-dreams all unfulfilled, and even the sense of uneasiness at my official shortcomings almost lulled to sleep, when I was suddenly aroused from this torpid condition by an interesting event.

My first intimation of this came from Colonel Murphy. That able officer had apparently never been able to overcome his sense of personal injury at my appointment to the Paymaster-Generalship—anticipating his prediction of my political success by a dozen years; and so, although we belonged to the same office, we rather avoided each other, a thing easy to do, as our work lay in different lines. But

we occasionally met at the Union Jack, and on this occasion my gallant friend came across the coffee-room to the table at which I was lunching, evidently with the object of telling me something.

The secret soon came out. "This is a nice step for Bracton, isn't it, and quite in his line too?"

Murphy saw by my look of surprise that his bolt had hit the mark. He had the pleasure of being the first to tell me that Bracton was made President of the Pauperism Commission—a piece of news he conveyed with an air of condescending glibness, as much as to say, "You see how little you are thought of in the office, although you *are* head of a department, that you are not told of these things."

But this was not all my friend had to say. There was another dart to be fired off, which he at once proceeded to discharge. "Hanged if I know, too, who they will find to put in his place. Bracton's a precious clever fellow; and although this sort of work wasn't perhaps much in his line, still he was a dab at moving the estimates and that sort of thing; spoke well, too. The Liberal party are clean used up, in my opinion—not a single rising man among the whole lot. Lord Lambswool would do, but then you see they must have the Under-Secretary in the Commons as long as Lord Stowe remains War Minister. I expect they will have to bring in an under-secretary from one of the other departments."

Murphy was, I think, puzzled, as he walked away,

why I smiled. Could he have made a bad shot? and was it really possible that, after all, I was behind the scenes, and knew more about the matter than he did? My ignorance, however, was in reality not assumed; but I could not help smiling, partly at the obvious device, partly because Murphy appeared to fancy that his depreciation of my claims might really have some effect in determining the reversion of the vacant appointment.

A more serious indication of the tendency of opinion was, that Lord Stowe, when he sent for me to his room an hour later on a small matter of business, made no allusion to the impending vacancy. Bracton himself came into my room shortly afterward to announce his preferment.

"I have got a piece of news for you, West."

"I fancy I have heard it already, if it is something you are to be congratulated on."

"How so? Who told you?"

"Colonel Murphy, at my club, just now."

"Ah, by the way, I did give him a hint about it this morning, when he was in my room, but I ought to have told him it was in confidence. Yes, I am going to the Pauperism Commission. I should have liked to stay on in this shop very well, but I saw it was no good trying to do anything with old Stowe at the head of it. And of course it will be pleasanter to be top-sawyer again, although in a smaller department; and then there is the higher pay, which, as I

ain't a Crœsus, is an object. To be sure, my re-election will be a ticklish affair; my respected constituents are a precious rum set of customers, and no mistake; and I can't say I look forward to the pleasure of meeting them again one bit, and that's a fact They can't understand that a fellow in office ain't quite so free to talk as he was when he was an independent member. They're always casting up what they call my pledges in my teeth. Blessed if I ever give any pledges again. However, I shall make room for you."

"I am not so sure of that. At any rate I have heard nothing about it, which looks as if the Government had other intentions."

"Oh, they must appoint you; there isn't a single chap about the Government with any claims to come in over your head in that way, who would care to look at the post."

"Yes; but what chance should I have, any more than you, of doing anything useful, if the head of the office is not prepared to do anything?"

"Oh, but the case is different. You have all the knowledge cut and dried for going ahead with; whereas I don't mind saying that I don't know much more about the army now than I did when I came here, and what is more, I don't find that I care much more about it. No, no; you can claim the appointment practically, for they can't afford to let you go into Opposition. You have got the gift of the gab,

you know, and could make yourself darned unpleasant in Opposition, and they know it too."

"I am afraid the appointment would be unpleasant to the office in any case. I am not very popular with the heads of departments now, and should be still less so as Under-Secretary, I fear."

"Unpopular? What does that matter? So am I always unpopular, and always shall be, but I have my way notwithstanding, and get what I want done. Bless me, you should have seen what a precious row there was at the Colliery Board when I cut down the allowance of red tape! Old Wregistre, the head-clerk, wanted to memorialise the Treasury: he said he had been forty years in the service, and had never been stinted in red tape before; but I stuck to my orders, and put every man jack of them on an allowance of twelve ounces a-year, and very soon heard no more of it."

At this point happily an interruption occurred to our conversation, for this criticism of our chief was hardly decorous, nor did I accept the notion of unpopularity with the philosophical indifference of my friend.

The settlement of the vacancy remained doubtful for some days. The Prime Minister, as I afterwards learned, had proposed at once to offer me the vacant appointment, but Lord Stowe objected on the ground that I should be troublesome. I do not know how far the final decision may have been influenced by

it, but my old friend the *Overseer*, in its weekly epigrammatic summary of news, while certifying that the Right Honourable John Bracton was advanced from the Under-Secretaryship of the War Department to his new appointment, and that the paupers would now have their turn of flagellation, added that of course the vacancy thus created would fall to Captain West. That at first promising but latterly indolent young official would now have an opportunity of winning his spurs. However that may be, Lord Stowe communicated to me one day that the Premier had authorised him to invite me to accept the vacant appointment, adding, in a pretty little speech, something about his satisfaction at the well-deserved advancement. But it is almost impossible to disguise one's sympathies, and my chief failed to conceal the feeling that the appointment was not really to his liking.

To his apparent surprise, I asked for time to consider the proposal, and going to my room wrote a note to Mr Merrifield, requesting an interview. He invited me, in reply, to breakfast with him the next morning at his house in Craven Square, that being the only time at which he was disengaged.

CHAPTER XLIV.

DRY BUT IMPORTANT.

THE Minister's breakfast-hour was nine, and he always joined Lady Elizabeth and his daughter at that meal, however late his engagements might have been the previous night—or morning. When, after it was concluded, we found ourselves alone, I opened the conversation. "I thought it would be best," I said, "to trouble you with a few minutes' conversation before definitely replying to the offer you have done me the honour to make. You may perhaps remember the conversations we had about army reform while down at Arrowdown. It will be pretty plain from what I said then that I have strong views on the subject, and the main object I should have before me in taking the higher office would be to endeavour to carry them out. Now, of course, it is useless to think of such schemes unless the Government, and especially the head of the Government, is prepared to support them. So I have ventured to waive etiquette, and to ask you the question, how far you are

prepared to adopt any proposals of this sort, provided Lord Stowe is ready, on their being unfolded, to bring them forward?"

The Premier leaned back in his chair thoughtfully, his elbows on the arms, the tips of his fingers balanced against each other. At last he said—

"Your programme, if I recollect rightly, was a pretty extensive one, and involved a general reorganisation of everything. Am I to understand that you make it a condition of taking up the Under-Secretaryship that we are to back up all the schemes for improving or altering the army which you may be prepared to devise?" and the Minister looked somewhat sarcastic.

"No, Mr Merrifield; please understand me. I am quite aware of the absurdity of a mere understrapper of the Government appearing to propose conditions on taking up a subordinate office, but still I feel that I should be doing more harm than good if trying to push on reforms when no one was prepared to aid in the matter. I should be dissatisfied with the position myself, and some person who feels less strongly on the subject would be better suited to the post, if nothing is to be done in it. He would give less trouble, and things would run more smoothly. But I did think and hope that the Government would be glad of an opportunity of gaining the credit to be got by undertaking a comprehensive scheme of army reform, to say nothing of the benefit to the country of

once and for all putting our military administration on a sound footing."

"What does Lord Stowe say to all your schemes? Have you discussed them with him?"

"Lord Stowe is, I should hope, as patriotic as the rest of his countrymen, and certainly I should suppose he is as fully alive as other people to the personal advantage that would accrue from being associated with the successful carrying out of a great national measure." This was a delicate way of saying that I hoped he would be ready to behave like a not altogether obstructive dummy. But, in fact, this part of the conversation was a rather delicate one. I could not say that I thought my chief was an old humbug; besides, Mr Merrifield must have long ago taken the measure of his colleague.

"But your schemes, I take it, even supposing they are such as would commend themselves to the Government—upon which point I am not prepared at present to give any opinion one way or the other—your schemes look as if they would cut out work enough to last for half-a-dozen sessions. What Ministry can expect in these days to hold out so long? And have you at all considered the effort involved, the mental and bodily strain, of carrying through such a task? Understand me. I desire administrative reform as much as any man, and I hope I appreciate official zeal and earnestness among my colleagues at its proper value; but we

are merely human beings, my dear Captain West, and the limit of capacity is soon reached, at any rate in Parliament." And the Minister's face assumed a jaded aspect as he spoke, and I thought I could read in the lines of his fine countenance the records of weary days and nights, of needless obstructions, and wranglings and debating; furrows worn by the friction—the ever-increasing friction—of Government by Parliaments and parties.

"One thing at least," I replied, "can be done, which will provoke no opposition; which need involve no trouble or labour except to the persons immediately concerned—the officials of the War Office; which indeed, so far from provoking opposition, would be sure to command universal approbation; and that is the decentralisation of the department and our whole system of military administration. This really great measure should be, I venture to think, the proper precursor of all other army reforms; at any rate, it can be carried out quite independently of them; and although a great measure, it is in reality one mainly of details, and to a great extent a technical question. It turns, in fact, on accounts."

I trembled as I said this, for I knew by experience how at the very word "accounts," most listeners, like human snails, would draw in their horns and cease to pay attention any longer to what was said. It was almost as bad as a reference to India. If you began to talk about estimates and accounts to

Lord Stowe, he at once assumed an attitude of vacant abstraction—looking through you as if gazing at his dear Sophia and the rest of his girls over in Switzerland. Even Bracton, shrewd, hard-headed man of business as he was, could not be got to go into details of accounts. For Burley, indeed, the subject possessed a sort of fascination, although I don't think he understood much about it; but with him accounts signified merely a vehicle for foisting some new return on the army, wherein the columns on the bottom of the page should give one set of facts, and those at the side another. But this was one of the qualities which, almost as much as his other great gifts, gave Mr Merrifield his superiority over all other public men of his time—his mastery over details. At the word "accounts" the languid expression passed away from his features; he brightened up and looked quite interested; and thus encouraged, I plunged at once into my subject.

This was the point, I said, which I had been so anxious to explain to him when I was honoured by the conversation we had together in the autumn on Arrowdown, but unfortunately the opportunity slipped away. That decentralisation should be the aim of every army reformer was generally admitted, but no one, so far as I knew, had yet pointed out how it could be effected. All those schemes which had been put forward for localising the army were very well as far as they went, but they did not go to the

bottom of the matter. We might imitate the German system in externals, and map out the country into military divisions, each with its permanent army corps—an arrangement, by the way, utterly unsuited to our condition of colonial service; but this at best would be only an external imitation. There is no good in multiplying staffs and departments if you do not give them authority; and yet it would be found that these local commanders and local staffs, should such come to be appointed, would have, and could have, no virtual responsibility. For the system of estimates and accounts now in force assumes a complete centralisation of initiating power within the War Office; and we may construct local arsenals and establish local magazines, but until the system of our accounts and estimates is altered, there can be no real effective decentralisation. For this there must first be a complete reconstruction of the system of estimates. The whole reform, as I conceived, really turned on that. "Let me explain what I mean by taking a case," said I, unfolding the estimates of the year, which I had brought with me in a despatch-box, in case the Premier should not have a copy at hand; "any item will do. At page 48, for example, we have 'Cost of Forage, and allowances in lieu, £448,889,' made up of 'General Staff, £15,556,' 'Control Staff, £5791,' and so on. Well now, the result of bringing these items together in one lump for the whole army is, that every item to

be expended against each of these sums must be referred to some one central authority who keeps the whole account in his hands. If during the year any additional claims arise in respect of forage, for example, it has to be referred to the central office. The authorities in Ireland, or Scotland, or anywhere else, cannot authorise any additional expenditure against a grant, however trifling, because they do not know whether the effect of such excess may not be to cause an excess over the aggregate sum provided. The only parties who can pronounce on the matter are those who know what is the total expenditure recorded against the vote—in other words, the accountants in Pall Mall. It is the same with every other item of army expenditure—fuel, rates, travelling expenses, purchase of stores, clothing, manufactures, everything. The whole system assumes that there should be one central office where all the threads are gathered up, and where the expenditure that is going on all over the world should be collected and recorded against the different votes; and that all officials at a distance should be kept in complete igornance as to what the effect of their expenditure may be upon the estimates generally. So long as this system is maintained decentralisation is impossible. Decentralisation means the delegation of authority; but any proposal of this sort is at once met by the objection that the expenditure could not in such case be checked by the estimates. And the

men who urge this objection have really at last got to think that it is unanswerable, and that the estimates in their present form are in the nature of things unalterable, so blinded do men become by working in routine.

"But further, even if the procedure in force did not call for alteration as a preliminary to reform in administration, it ought, I submit, to be altered, because the estimates in their present form are intrinsically defective. There is a great show of information and detail about them, but in reality they supply a minimum of either. The popular notion is, that this detail is furnished for the benefit of members of Parliament. It would be more correct to assume that they are made up in their present form in view to bewildering members of Parliament, and concealing the facts. What are the emoluments of any given official,—say, for example, a Controller? You cannot find out from the estimates. The 'pay proper,' indeed, is given, but the 'allowances' of the whole Control Department are lumped together—the forage in one item, the fuel in another, rates and taxes in another, and so on; so that the total emoluments of any one officer, either in that or any other department, can nowhere be ascertained. It is just the same with the estimates of the manufacturing departments. What can a member of Parliament possibly predicate from the item of £29,000 for 'Piece-work' under the head Clothing, or from the

fact that £40,000 is going to be spent in saltpetre, and £188,000 in purchase of metals? What he and everybody else would like to know is the cost of coats and greatcoats and other items of clothing, and the number to be made during the year; the quantity of gunpowder to be manufactured, and its cost per barrel; and so on for other articles. On all these points the estimates do not give him a particle of information. They are useless even for the manufacturing departments themselves; because as the same official seldom deals with an article throughout all its stages, he has not the means of watching the account. One man buys the saltpetre, another converts it into gunpowder; neither of them, therefore, knows the whole cost of the operation. It is the same with every other branch of any manufacture. The only people who have the means of ascertaining the whole of the facts are the accountants in the central office; and they, being at a distance from the scene of operations, possibly do not understand what are necessarily complicated transactions, and if they attempt to bring out prices and results, simply make a muddle of it.

"My view, therefore, is, that the estimates should be entirely recast in form. The general estimates should be framed to show the expenditure locally, so that the general officers commanding districts should know what is the expenditure sanctioned for their respective districts, and then the supply

officers under them would really be able to control the expenditure, and their functions would bear some sort of relation to their titles. The same sort of change should be extended to all supply branches and to the manufacturing departments; that is to say, the votes should be distributed by disbursers instead of by services, as in fact is now done in the Works branch, the only one in which the estimates are framed on a sound principle. In that branch the estimates do not bring together the outlay of bricks, or lime, or timber throughout the British empire; but the cost of each work is shown separately, and therefore in the case of that branch only is there the means of enforcing local responsibility. What is needed is to extend that system to the other branches of army expenditure. Such a change would not interfere with the system of votes, or appropriations, or audit, or anything else that is implied in Parliamentary government; on the contrary, the control of Parliament would really become much more complete and effective than it is now, because members would then be able to find out what is the real cost of each part of the army: in place of the mystification which now wraps up the army expenditure, we should have real simplicity.

"Further, the audit should be local as well as the expenditure. By this I do not mean that it should not come under the scrutiny of the central authority, but that instead of the auditors sitting in Pall Mall

and receiving detailed accounts and vouchers, sent up in waggon-loads from all parts of the empire, involving endless references and calls for explanations, which after all can often not be made clear to people at a distance ignorant of the nature of the transactions—instead of this, the accounts should, as far as possible, be audited on the spot where the expenditure takes place, by auditors either permanently detached, or sent out from time to time from the War Department. Not the least of the benefits would be the education thus given to the officers concerned —by which I mean the whole of my department, senior and junior clerks, and all, who, never seeing anything now of the army except on paper, and passing their lives in the dull routine of mechanical tasks, come often to perform them in a dull, unintelligent way. Auditors are not in the nature of things more stupid than other people: it is their training which brings them to do their work in the aggravating way now so often manifested—to mistake the form for the essence of the work.

"But the main advantage to be claimed for this scheme has yet to be stated. It would be equally suitable for war and peace. And that surely is the point to be aimed at in all military administration, yet it is just where our present system fails. Of course there must be greater laxity on active service than is permissible in peace time, but we might surely contrive a mode of doing business which should in

a general way be the type on which army administration should be conducted under all circumstances. If, for example, army finance and administration were localised in the way I have indicated, each army corps—or whatever the administrative unit may be called—having its own civil staff, trained in peace time to all the functions which have to be exercised in war—pay, supply, audit, financial control really so called: then if this corps were sent on active service, the functionaries who accompanied it would carry with them into the field the experience they had gained in the exercise of independent responsibility; and that experience would beget what I may call financial self-possession, a quality which has hitherto been utterly wanting to our spending departments in the field. This surely would be an improvement on the present condition of things, when the centralised inflexible control exercised by the central department in peace is perforce abandoned on the outbreak of war, to be succeeded by a state of wild confusion, when rules of every kind are thrown to the winds, and those who have never been allowed to spend anything rush to the other extreme, and pour out money like water. This has happened before on every occasion of war, and is sure to happen again. It is the inevitable tendency of a thoroughly centralised system such as ours, to go on ever centralising; piling up checks and forms in search of an ideal perfection of supervision, till when the machine

comes under the rough usage of war it breaks down from its own weight and complexity. War is a brutally rough exercise at best, and we can hardly make our apparatus too simple or too elastic if we mean it to stand the strain."

But all these reforms, I submitted, would come short of what was necessary unless supplemented by another radical change of system. "The War Department, as now constituted, should be dismantled, and broken up into a number of smaller separate offices. The theory of the present concentration is, no doubt, to avoid correspondence and delay in despatch of business; but the point of concentration may easily be carried too far, and then instead of simplicity you get complexity and confusion. This, however, is a minor point. The main objection to the present arrangement is, that it involves over-centralisation of the worst form. All authority being vested in the Secretary of State, no proper responsibility is exercised by the various heads of executive departments. The unhealthy fiction set up is, that the former administers every branch of the army directly in his own person, delegating no authority to any subordinate officials, and being alone responsible for the conduct of all business transacted by them down to the minutest details. In pursuance of this fiction, every order issued from the office goes forth in the name of the Secretary of State; every letter that comes in is addressed to the Under-Sec-

retary, as if intended to be laid before his chief. Thus the authority, not to say the very existence, of the heads of departments, even the Parliamentary as well as the permanent officers who really dispose of nine-tenths of the work, is entirely ignored.

But this constant employment of the Secretary of State's name upon the most trifling references—matters about which he cannot be, and, from the nature of the case, ought not to be, concerned—tends in fact rather to weaken than to strengthen his authority. Men outside the office feel that they are not really contending with him, but with some subordinate using his name; in short, we have a perpetual sham.

"Moreover, it has led to an inordinate degree of interference with the executive officers of the army, carried on under shelter of the Minister's name by officials whose own identity does not appear on the record; interference which they would not venture to exercise avowedly in their own persons. Make heads of departments specifically responsible for all the business they transact, and they will cease to worry other people in this way. Simplification and reduction of work are sure to follow.

"This over-centralisation is, of course, fatal to the efficiency of the executive departments. Take a case which may be fresh in recollection. A regiment marches from one country town to another—of course under orders issued direct from Pall Mall—and the provisions which ought to have been supplied on the

way are not forthcoming. A row is got up about it; questions are asked in the House; inquiry is made; and it is found that there is really no one to come down upon. All the orders in the case have slipped through under the initials of the Minister, and the only person on whom responsibility can be fixed, if it is to be fixed on any one, is himself. Thus the very people who want most to be looked after, the heads of the executive departments, are the very men who escape all responsibility, except the indirect responsibility of a clerk to the head of his office.

"But still more, the tendency of all this centralisation is to render the direct interference of the War Minister, real or nominal, far too minute and prominent. It is said sometimes that his control over all branches of the army is not sufficiently established. I maintain, on the contrary, that it is carried much too far. What between the pressure of Parliament in one direction, always looking to him for information and explanation, and the natural tendency of officials trained as ours are to shrink from responsibility and refer everything to their chief, the latter has practically usurped functions which, from the nature of the case, he cannot fulfil properly. Take the late autumn manœuvres for example. These are supposed to be an imitation of war procedure, so far as imitation is possible, and yet what could be more unlike? And we have gone out of our way to make it so. Every little trifling detail has been carried out in our office in the name, real or assumed, of the

War Minister; and then, when every arrangement is complete, and the troops are assembled, a couple of elderly generals are picked out from the reserve list, and put down to play with the troops for a fortnight, and then sent home again. Could anything be more unlike actual war? In fact, our office ought to be called the Peace Department rather than the War Department, for this sort of interference is only possible during peace; business could not be carried on in this sort of way for an hour in war time. We have heard a great deal about the creditable labours of our office in preparing for the manœuvres; we ought to be ashamed rather than proud of them, for we ought by rights to have had nothing to do with them.

"I conceive, then, that the War Minister should be much less of an executive head than he has now got by degrees to become. His business should be rather to supervise others than to act himself. And the first step towards this is to break up the Office; to detach the different heads of executive departments and their establishments, and make them exercise their functions on their own responsibility, reducing the War Department proper to a brace of under secretaries and a few clerks."

Such is an outline of the plans I submitted to Mr Merrifield, who listened with great attention, occasionally throwing in a remark, or asking a question for further elucidation.

When I had finished speaking, he observed that it was a pretty big scheme; had I spoken to Lord Stowe about it?

I replied that I had not. It seemed useless to discuss the matter with him before ascertaining whether the proposal would be likely to be agreeable to himself and the Government generally. All that Lord Stowe could say would be that he would consult him (Mr Merrifield) and the Cabinet, so I thought it better to come at once to the fountain-head and see whether there was any reasonable chance of my views being accepted.

"But surely you cannot expect me or any other man to swallow all that screed of doctrine at once, not to say anything of the great schemes you shadowed forth when we were staying at Strickland's, for upsetting everything generally."

"I think Mr Merrifield is hardly the person to sneer at schemes which savour of the subversive."

"Excuse me. I had no intention of sneering, and if I appeared so ill-mannered, must apologise. But, my dear Captain West, you must see the impossibility of my ever assenting to the propriety of your schemes, still less committing the Government to any pledge to adopt them, merely on such a statement as you have favoured me with, and that, too, even before the Minister of the department has been consulted. You must see that such a proposal is, to say the least, somewhat unreasonable."

"Pray do not suppose that I meant anything so more than unreasonable, so utterly absurd. All that I can expect or ask is to be able to carry you with me, if ever my schemes arrive at the point of assuming a definite form, and of their being of a sort to approve themselves to your judgment."

Mr Merrifield replied that any schemes brought under his consideration would of course command careful attention.

This, however, I explained, was not exactly what I wanted. Proposals brought before the Government by a member of the Government—even a subordinate one—would of course be looked at. I knew that. But the case was really this. Without wishing to prescribe conditions, which would be absurd for an Under-Secretary, I might say that I should only care to undertake office with the object of assisting to carry out what I conceived to be reforms. To enter on it with any other object would be merely to give trouble to no purpose. What, then, I really desired, was to know whether he thought my ideas on the subject reasonable and feasible, so far as I had explained them?

Mr Merrifield answered that he thought (speaking of course under reservation) there was unquestionably a good deal in my proposals that seemed very ingenious, and possibly that might prove very beneficial; "but," he added, smiling, and yet with a look of weariness passing over his face, called up, I fancied,

by the spectres of long days and nights wasted in fruitless sittings in the House—"but, my dear Captain West, do you know what such a reform as this means? Young and ardent members never seem to realise the difficulty of carrying out a measure of any sort through Parliament, the impotence of even the strongest Governments to do these things."

I replied that I thought it did not need to be old to see how much friction was involved by our system of government, and how large were the powers of obstruction of even those members who were good for nothing else. "But, on the other hand," I continued, "it seems to me that Governments are always strongest when they are dealing with strong measures. When you carried your great measure on the law of entail, how irresistible you were! while on that miserable little question whether children under ourteen should be allowed to buy more than a pint of malt liquor at a time, or again, whether the school boards should face their buildings in stucco,—why, all party bonds seemed to be dissevered, and we could not be sure of a majority from one day to another. Could there," I went on to say, "be a surer card to play for keeping our party in, to put the case on its lowest grounds, than to come forward with a bold scheme of army reform,—supposing, of course, that it commends itself to the general approbation of the country?"

"I confess your scheme would have even greater

attractions, West, if it were a sure card to play for turning our party out." And the Minister yawned languidly, while the jaded look I had noticed before again passed over his face.

This was the first symptom I had noticed in the great Minister of that fatigue of office which so often attacks our statesmen. Hitherto, and especially during our visit to the Stricklands, he had always manifested a thorough zest for official life, and even the wear and tear of Parliamentary wrangle seemed not to produce any sense of distress in him as it did in other people. Perhaps in the quiet time before the session began, his heart failed him at the prospect of coming strife more than it would do when the sound of battle actually arose; for Mr Merrifield was emphatically a Parliamentary war-horse, and when the trumpet of debate sounded, would be sure to rush gaily into the battle.

"If we are to be turned out," I observed, "at least let us be turned out on some question worthy of being defeated on, instead of expiring of inanition, or under the combined effect of a multitude of petty defeats. But I cannot help believing that in reality our party would really be strengthened immensely by bringing forward such a measure. We should carry the country with us for a certainty; and not only the people who go in for efficiency regardless of economy; we should have the economists with us too, Drylands, and Allus Wright, and Rigby Sebright,

and that set, because I verily believe that you may make the army both cheaper and more efficient at the same time."

Such is an outline of the conversation. The final result was, that Mr Merrifield arranged for Lord Stowe to meet me at his house a day or two afterwards, when, in the presence of the two Ministers, I unfolded my scheme to the latter.

"What do you think of that for a programme, Stowe?" said Mr Merrifield, when I had done speaking. "Pretty extensive, is it not? Now the question is, how far can we support our young friend here? He cuts out plenty of work for you at any rate."

"Yes," I observed; "but then I should hope that a great measure of this sort, improved as it would be in Lord Stowe's hands, and carried through successfully, would procure the War Minister an undying reputation." I tried to say this gravely, but felt that I seemed to be making fun of Lord Stowe, and that Mr Merrifield knew that I was doing so; and the mutual consciousness thus set up made us both, I think, a little uncomfortable. But Lord Stowe had no misgivings. He looked more than ever as if he thought he resembled William Pitt as he replied,—"Oh, as for hard work, an old official like me is accustomed to it." And then he went on to say that the improvement of army administration had ever been one of the objects dearest to him; that he fully

recognised the originality and value of my ideas, and had no doubt he should be able, with the advantage of my help, to introduce many valuable reforms in various parts of the system.

Nothing could at first sight be more satisfactory; but, in fact, Lord Stowe promised too readily, having evidently no clear notion of what was proposed, or of the difficulty involved. However, the agreement tacitly come to, furnished me, to all appearance, with the opportunity I wished for. Lord Stowe was to afford me full power of initiation, and to back up all proposals which commended themselves to his judgment; while Mr Merrifield, who was evidently impressed by the ideas I had put forward, and exhibited a much more lively interest in the matter than Lord Stowe, expressed himself as prepared to support us in the Cabinet. In fact, army reform might very possibly be developed into one of the great schemes of the session. "But we must consult the heads of departments, West, before we do anything," said his lordship, as we parted in the office lobby; "they have great experience and judgment—Burley especially—and enormous knowledge on these subjects. They will, no doubt, be able to throw a great deal of light on some of these difficult questions, and make them look quite simple."

CHAPTER XLV.

UNEXPECTED HELP.

A DAY or two after the events recorded in the last chapter, I met Mr Strickland in the coffee-room of the Minerva, to which select institution I had lately been elected. He had come up to town thus early with Mrs Strickland, before the meeting of Parliament, to consult their physician about her health. He of course congratulated me on my advancement. "You will now be able to set about carrying out some of your pet designs. Without altogether agreeing with you, I shall still be very glad to see you successful; anything must be better than letting things stand still."

"I am not very sanguine of doing much. The more I see of the working of Governments, the more difficult it appears to effect anything. The tendency of modern times seems to be towards a general breakdown of Ministers from sheer overweight of details and petty obstructions."

"Too true, I fear," answered Strickland; "it is a

melancholy sight to see the whole force of the Government employed night after night to carry some wretched little measure through committee. I never cease to congratulate myself on having resisted the allurements of office. I should not have minded the useful work; it is the work to no purpose that is so irksome."

"Then look at the way in which needless fetters are imposed on our leading men. They get no assistance in their confidential work. A Minister's private secretaries ought to be almost as able as himself, and he ought to be allowed a dozen if he wants them. But the salaries are fixed at a rate about suitable for a junior bank-clerk, so they have to be paid by preferment; and whenever any wretched little post is vacant in the permanent Civil Service, the confidential *aide* has to be got rid of, very possibly just when he is about becoming efficient. Even then, perhaps, a cry will be raised about jobbery and patronage. The fact is, Ministers have no patronage nowadays, except bishoprics and things of that sort which they don't care about."

"The whole question of the Civil Service will have to be taken up soon," observed Strickland, "if its character is not to suffer permanent deterioration. I don't say that this has set in yet, but it can hardly be delayed much longer if something is not done to prevent it."

"Are you a disbeliever, then, in the virtue of open competition?"

"I was not thinking of that just now, although, no doubt, the system is mixed up with a lot of tomfoolery. I had in view what is going on at the top of the Service, rather than the mode of filling it up at the bottom. It is extraordinary to me that Governments—neither our side nor the other—seem to see that the pay of the Civil Service has for the last thirty years been undergoing rapid deterioration, because it is not sharing in the general increase of wealth going on among all other classes. Twelve hundred a-year was a very fine salary at the beginning of the century, when the present scale of emoluments was fixed. But it is a very poor thing now. And yet, instead of accepting the fact of the decline in the value of money, and taking some steps to remedy its effect on the Service, both parties seem to vie with each other in taking every opportunity to cut down the good things of the Service. You can never take up the estimates for any year without seeing a note against some of the higher appointments, that the salary is to be reduced on the next occurrence of a vacancy—as if this were a highly creditable thing to do, instead of a piece of fatuous folly."

"Still the salaries of heads of departments are quite sufficient for comfort."

"That depends on what comfort means. I suspect there is no class in London which finds so much difficulty in making two ends meet. If when this great

influx of wealth first began to set in, which you may date from the abolition of the Corn Laws, the salaried and professional classes had taken their stand on their social and mental status, and maintained a frugal style of living, like the clergy, in contrast to the *nouveaux riches*, their position would have been elevated instead of lowered. But, unfortunately, this sort of simplicity is opposed to the genius of the English middle class; at any rate, the attempt was not made. Everybody must dress and look and dine alike, and the only difference is, that whereas with the commercial classes their increase of profits has kept pace with the more expensive style of living introduced, the people on fixed incomes find an ever-increasing difficulty in maintaining customary appearances. One expense, indeed, they could not avoid, were they ever so frugal—that of education. Now that patronage is closed, a good education is absolutely necessary for boys, if they are to be placed out in the world; and that is a great and increasing difficulty for those who have families."

"And yet the reputation of the Civil Service has not abated, either for ability or character. On the contrary, I should say it never stood higher in this respect than it does now."

"Very true; and heaven grant the day may never come when any deterioration sets in! But what seems to me to have taken place already is, that the abler of the members have begun to take systema-

tically to other ways of earning money. All my friends in the public service seem to have other irons in the fire. They bring out plays, or edit books, or write for the papers. Of course they do their proper work too; and, no doubt, pursuits of this sort, carried on to a reasonable extent, improve a man's efficiency rather than otherwise; they lift him above the ruts of office drudgery. But I think the time may perhaps come when men will look to these things more as a systematic means of eking out a livelihood, and less as a mere recreation for leisure time, and be driven for sheer want of money to give the best of their talents to private business, and merely the fag-end of it to their official duties; and this will be a very bad thing for the Government and the country. When a man who has to draft a despatch on which peace or war turns, is under bonds to deliver so many sheets of his novel to the printer on the same day, it may fare badly with the despatch, I fear."

"Talking of the difficulty about Ministers getting help," I observed, "I find this difficulty very forcibly in my way just now. Young Roundhand, my private secretary, is a very good little fellow, methodical, and obliging, and intelligent, and all that sort of thing; but his practical experience of the army has been limited to looking on now and then at the Palace-guard mounting hard by. It is the same, of course, with the whole Office—all very good fellows,

and many of them very able men, but they look at the army through official spectacles. I have applied for an additional private secretary, a military man, but I shall give offence to the Office, I fear, and very likely cause a row in the House, for there is no precedent for an Under-Secretary having two *aides*."

The next morning after this conversation I received a visit from Mr Strickland while we were at breakfast; or, rather, while I was at breakfast, for Eva seldom came down in time to share that meal.

"Excuse this early call," he said, "and still more the liberty I am going to take; but I thought I would unburden my mind of my purpose at once. You want a military man as private secretary. Why not give Tom a trial?"

"Tom Strickland?"

"Why not? He is clever enough, I am sure, though I am his father."

"Clever enough! I should think he was. But the idea of Tom being anybody's private secretary, much less mine, would certainly have never occurred to me."

"Nor to me either in ordinary course; but it came across me suddenly after I saw you yesterday. The fact is, as I daresay you may have discovered for yourself before this. Tom has caused his mother and myself a great deal of anxiety from first to last, and we are both very anious to see him settle down to steady work of some kind. He may have to wait

a long time before he steps into my shoes; and, besides, he won't be fit to play the country gentleman if he goes on idling much longer, or worse. His life has been a failure so far. Clever as he is, he has done nothing except spend money and health. He is tired of mere soldiering, and is too old to go into any other line. Now, if he got into the War Office, and had something to interest him in his profession, it might give a new turn altogether. A bout of official life would do him an immense deal of good; and if he took to the work kindly, as I really believe he would, I am sure you would find him very efficient."

"I have not the least doubt of that; and I quite believe with you that official life would be the very thing for him; but surely this would be beginning at the wrong end. I should be afraid that he would be too clever for this sort of thing. Why, your son is one of the cleverest men in London. I ought to be his secretary intead of he being mine. I never could understand, indeed, why you did not bring him into Parliament. With his talents and position he might rise to anything. I should feel a mere political adventurer in comparison with him."

"Yes, you may well ask that. I wanted him to stand for South Yewcestershire many years ago, just after he came of age; and I believe we should have brought him in easily, but he was full of horse-racing then, and tomfoolery of all sorts, and declared that

the age of professional politicians had gone by (you know his sneering way); and since then he has got into disfavour down there, and we had words about it; and so time has passed on, and the result is that my boy is just what you see—clever enough, and good at bottom, I verily believe, but simply throwing his life away, and getting on towards middle age without ever having done anything, except, as I said, spending money and giving trouble to his family;" and as he finished his sentence, Mr Strickland's face assumed a careworn aspect, and he seemed to look older and more haggard than I had ever seen him look before.

I had heard at odd times, more by allusion than direct information, something of Captain Strickland's antecedents. Heir to a fine estate and one of the oldest names in the country, he had gone up to Christ Church with a great reputation for ability, and was expected to take a distinguished degree, but getting into a scrape, only avoided expulsion by taking his name off the books, and exchanging an academical career for a commission in the Guards. Then followed a bout of horse-racing, when, after very nearly winning the Derby twice, and losing heavily much oftener, he retired from the turf, and his father paid his debts. This episode created an estrangement between the two; for Mr Strickland, like many men with a large rent-roll, was probably not overburdened with ready money, and the sum to be paid

was large. A year or two later the military papers were full of a mysterious rumour about an alleged *fracas* in a certain distinguished regiment, and the matter even reached the point of notoriety of being discussed with more or less accuracy in the clubs. Some people said that there was a lady in the case; others that the colonel had been insulted by a gross caricature; all agreed that the matter must come to a court-martial; but it was finally settled without being made public, after the offender had sent in and been allowed to recall his papers for purchase. But a black mark was placed against Captain Strickland's name in the Military Secretary's books; and when an old friend of his father, who was appointed to a high military command abroad, wanted to take him out on his personal staff, the Horse Guards refused to sanction the nomination. Shortly after this occurred the row down in Yewcestershire, the effect of which was no doubt seriously to diminish the popularity of the family in that county, and to extinguish all chance of the younger Strickland finding a Parliamentary opening there.

Such were, so far as I knew them, the antecedents of our friend, who, when I first made his acquaintance, was a man of a little over thirty, but who looked older. Of about middle height, with dark hair and eyes, a face smooth shaven save for a pointed black moustache, regular well-cut features, a clever mouth, and a general look of determination which his

antecedents so far belied, Tom Strickland was a very noticeable man anywhere. A good rider, who did not care much for hunting; almost as skilful with the pencil as a second-rate artist; with a touch on the pianoforte that a professional might have envied; fond of society, and yet always appearing to be bored by it; with no apparent hobbies to spend money on, and yet seemingly always at the wrong end of a liberal allowance, — Tom Strickland gave one the impression of a man of ability, which he had never turned to any useful purpose, and who, without any stigma of dishonour, had yet the faculty of getting into scrapes.

Such was the man who now became my private secretary. For asking Mr Strickland whether he thought his son would care about undertaking the duty, he said, "I have no doubt of it. I mentioned to him last night casually, when we were discussing your appointment, that I wished you would take him as your private secretary, and he replied he should like nothing better. Of course I did not tell him that I should take the liberty of proposing the thing to you. In fact, the idea did not occur to myself till afterwards."

After this there was nothing to be done but to offer the appointment to Tom Strickland. I liked the man himself, whose manners, indeed, possessed a peculiar fascination, in that, while possessing great powers of sarcasm, he reserved them for the public,

never saying an ill-natured thing about one friend to another, and being always goodtempered and obliging at home. We were, moreover, under obligations to the family, especially to Mrs Strickland, who, I suspected, had probably more to do with suggesting the arrangement than her husband. But I confess to feeling a little afraid of him in his new capacity. "You know," I said, when he came down to the office, in reply to a summons, "I'm a little anxious lest this arrangement may prove a failure. I shall not ask you to write private notes, and so forth; little Roundhand will do all that sort of thing; but still there will be plenty of hard work and drudgery. There is no doubt as to your talents, of course. In fact, I believe you are much cleverer than I am; but I am afraid, to be quite plain, that you are too much of a swell for the post. I should be really sorry if your taking it led to our becoming less good friends than we are at present."

Tom Strickland, however, was very confident about his success, and eager to undertake any amount of work. The fact was, he said, it was time to turn over a new leaf. The men in the brigade thought he could do nothing, and his father looked on him as a regular *raurien;* and, in truth, he had so far led a useless, troublesome life. But he was heartily sick of it now, and wanted to show that he was really fit for something.

"Well, but," I observed, playing my last card,

"there is still one objection to be mentioned. It seems ungracious to suggest nothing but obstacles, but it is better to make them beforehand. You might get your promotion any day, and then how would you like to be serving as a lieutenant-colonel under a plain captain?"

"Why anticipate difficulties? I don't expect to get my promotion before the Government goes out. Besides, you will not stay in the army for ever."

"Why not?"

"I should have thought the difficulty would have occurred to you before. I don't want to flatter you, but a man who can speak as you can, and who has got such a start in life, cannot expect to remain always an under-secretary. But you will find your captain's commission a great obstacle to rising higher. Retire from the army and you may be anything you like. The difficulty as regards myself and my rank would then altogether disappear. It wouldn't matter being a field-marshal if you were plain Mr West."

Thus was the matter settled. The Office generally seemed a little inclined to resent the appointment as an invasion of its rights, and the Treasury objected at first on the score of expense; but this little difficulty was surmounted, and a day or so afterwards Strickland came to dine at the little house by Queen's Gate, in view to our setting to work afterwards to draw up a grand memorandum of the different measures to be brought forward.

CHAPTER XLVI.

ON DETAILS, PRIVATE AND PUBLIC.

"If I had known that dinner was to be exceptionally late, Eva, I would have proposed that Captain Strickland and I should go into business first, and dine afterwards; but I thought if we allowed half an hour's margin, there would be a reasonable chance of getting something to eat at the end of it; but one can't set to work fasting."

This observation was made as we sat with our guest before the drawing-room fire waiting for dinner.

"I am sorry I cannot sympathise with my respected host," said Strickland; "but I had luncheon rather late at the Wanderers, and am not particularly hungry. But I ought not to be so selfish, when I see Mrs West evidently suffering from the pangs of hunger."

"No, indeed," observed Eva; "I never feel hungry in London, but my husband is, because he speaks so crossly. He always gets cross when dinner is late."

"Then I am afraid you make me out to be in a state of permanent ill-temper, for it is not within my recollection that dinner or anything else in this house has ever been in time."

"How can you say such things, Charlie! I am sure I do my best, but you are so dreadfully particular. If everything is not ready to a minute, Captain Strickland, he makes such a fuss about it."

"Then, my love, as I observed before, I must spend my life in making a fuss, for certainly nothing ever is ready to a minute in this house. If we said ready to an hour, it would be nearer to the mark."

"Well, I am sure you are unpunctual enough yourself sometimes. How often have we kept dinner waiting for ever so long while you were staying away at that horrid House of Commons? It is no wonder the servants are unpunctual."

"My dear, allow me to observe that the House of Commons has not been sitting since August, between which time and this present January it might have been possible to get over the demoralising effects of my unpunctuality; and considering that we have changed our servants about half-a-dozen times since then, I do not see how my bad example can be responsible for the present state of things."

"Not half-a-dozen times; how can you exaggerate so! We have only had four cooks altogether since we came to town. There was Smithers, who robbed us so; and then Jobbins, who was so violent with

the man-servant; and then that poor woman who was fetched away by the police, and——"

"My dear, you need not be at the trouble of going into the statistics of our domestic miseries; to recapitulate our domestic changes would involve something like the Homeric catalogue of ships: the fact remains that dinner was supposed to be ordered for half-past seven, and that it is now ten minutes after eight, and Captain Strickland and I have a long evening's work to get through afterwards."

"If I might venture to move an amendment," said our guest, "I would propose that Mrs West favour us with a little music. I always, for my part, prefer music before dinner, and I suppose we shall be too busy to get any afterwards."

Eva said that she would sing something with pleasure, and went to the piano, but she got up with a show of petulance, and merely ran over the keys for a time, evidently too much out of temper to play with composure. Strickland stood near the piano, turning over the music-books that lay on a side-table, while I remained moodily at the other end of the room, annoyed that a bickering should have arisen on such a trifle as the dinner-hour; still more, that a visitor should have witnessed it, and that it should have been left to his superior tact to turn it aside. A foolish vanity perhaps took offence at the proposal, the ceremony of his entry on secretariat duty being hardly of a kind to be suitably opened by

customary performance of music; but, worse than all, my heart grew bitter as I thought what a change had come over our life, and our feeling towards each other. It had come to this already, and we had been married less than two years! But a few short months ago, and the very semblance of reproach would have brought Eva to me, suppliant and in tears. Now blame was met with petulance, and we seemed to be already on the brink of mutual disparagement and distrust.

Eventually dinner was announced, and manners under its influence gradually assumed their usual tone, without any further explanations or apologies —as was, alas! too often now the case. Dinner ended, my new private secretary and I repaired to the back-room, and set about writing down the heads of the different proposals to be brought before the Government. Strickland wrote at the table while I walked up and down, or stood before the fire.

The following was the substance of the memorandum as finally read over by Strickland :—

"*Note of proposed modifications in our military system.* [Better call them modifications, I said when dictating, and not reforms; old Stowe will not be so much frightened.]

"These naturally divide into two main heads, our military administration, and the organisation of the army, which may be kept separate.

"*Military Administration.*

"All the proposals made under this head have in view a process of decentralisation, involving a large delegation of authority to officials of all classes, with a distinct definition of their respective powers and responsibilities.

"This proposal includes, amongst other things, Decentralisation of Army Financé, a first step towards which is the

Reconstruction of the Form of Army Estimates,

so as to show expenditure locally, instead of bringing all the expenditure under the various heads of service into lump sums. Perhaps my meaning may be best explained by an illustration.

"There are two branches of the estimates which are already decentralised—the pay of the troops and the outlay on works. A regimental paymaster has no difficulty in paying a regiment, because there are specific tables setting forth what each man may claim, and also a definite sanctioned establishment for each regiment. So also you see put down,—cost of fortifications at Malta, £50,000; cost of barracks at Montreal, £60,000; and so on. Thus the local officers at Malta and Montreal know exactly what their responsibilities are with respect to this board of expenditure. But, observe, the estimates are in this respect quite exceptional; if they had been prepared for these items according to the pattern

observed in respect of other services we should have had such heads as these: 'Pay of the Captains in the Army;' 'ditto of the Corporals;' 'Purchase of Bricks throughout the British Empire;' 'Purchase of Lime throughout ditto;' 'Purchase of Nails throughout ditto;' and so forth; and every executive officer would be utterly in the dark as to what his liabilities and powers might be, while somebody in Pall Mall would be totalling up all the separate purchases made for these different articles, in order to see that the aggregate outlay on bricks and lime and nails all over the world did not exceed the votes. And this tomfoolery, forsooth, would be called financial supervision, or maintaining the recognised principle of civil control over army expenditure.

"I am not exaggerating in the least. This is precisely the way in which the estimates are now prepared in regard to all other branches of military expenditure; and the first step towards decentralisation and common-sense is to distribute all charges locally, and by services. Thus, for example, the different votes for fuel, lodging-money, and so forth, should be split up, so that the actual allowances as well as pay of each person in the Control and other staff departments may be distinctly ascertained. The estimates seem to be framed now on purpose to hide these points. The expenditure could then be compared with the votes as it takes place, without need to refer everything to a central office.

"The same remarks have special application to the estimates and accounts of the manufacturing departments. What should we think of a railway company whose accounts showed what was spent on iron and wood, but did not bring out the cost of making a locomotive, or a passenger carriage, or any other information whatever to show whether their stock was cheap or dear? or of a mechanical engineer who kept an account of labour and materials, but could not do more than guess at the cost of any of his tools, and of the work they turned out? And yet this is the mode in which the most important part of our military expenditure is accounted for. Turn to the estimates, and you find, 'Wages of Clothing Department,' 'Time and Piece-work,' 'Materials to be purchased,' 'Wages of Manufacturing Department,' 'Timber,' 'Fuel,' 'Metals,' 'Saltpetre,' and so forth. Yet who on earth is the wiser for this information? Under a great pretence of detail, there is in fact the most complete mystification. The estimates, indeed, in their present form, seem purposely devised to minister to that besetting passion for centralisation which animates our military system. For the result of bringing all the purchases for timber, and fuel, and saltpetre, and so forth, together under one vote, is that while the local manufacturing officers are kept in the dark as to the correspondence between the votes and expenditure—because the same officer who buys the raw

material does not as a rule work it up—the key to the mystery is kept by the central office in Pall Mall; and so accounts and vouchers by the cartload have to be shot in there in order that the outlay may be recorded against these general votes.

"Further, the audit of the expenditure should be conducted entirely on the spot, not a single voucher being sent forward. This would put a stop to an enormous waste of clerical labour. Just think what would be involved if the London and North-Western Railway were to keep the accounts of their Crewe workshops at Euston instead of at Crewe. This is what we attempt now with our great establishments at Woolwich. My plan, I admit, will leave a lot of our clerks with nothing to do; but if the matter is once understood, the case for reform must be admitted.

"A similar process of decentralisation to be applied to the army accounts in all departments, and these accounts to be always audited so far as possible on the spot, either by district auditors, or auditors sent down on deputation from time to time. The copying of accounts and sending about of vouchers to be, in fact, everywhere suppressed."

"Excuse my interrupting you," observed Strickland, looking up from his writing, "but is there not an operation known as the appropriation audit? something done independently of the War Depart-

ment? and might not this interfere with your scheme for decentralising?"

"The authority of Parliament would be needed to carry out the change, no doubt. But Parliament desires military efficiency as much as other people, and would cordially approve of the change, it may be hoped, when the object of it was understood. If we are always to work on the assumption that no one is ever under any circumstances to be trusted in anything, then of course you must go on piling checks upon checks. But the object which ought to be kept in view is surely to establish a system in peace-time which may be expanded to suit a state of war.

"Observe, too, that the assumption which underlies our present system, that no one shall exercise any responsibility but the Secretary of State and the Comptroller-General of the Exchequer, involves, from the nature of the case, a sham, unless we also assume that they can virtually delegate their powers to subordinates. Well, nothing more is assumed in the present case, except that the delegation shall be given to persons trained in a good instead of a bad way.

"Now, to the next great measure—

Decomposition of the War Department.

"The War Office as now constructed to be broken up, each of the different sub-departments being constituted as a separate office:—viz.

Commissariat.
Stores.
Manufactures.
Clothing.
Works.
Pay and Audit.
Discipline."

"But," objected Strickland again, "is it not alleged that the object of consolidating these departments in one office and under one roof is to reduce correspondence and circumlocution? That objection will certainly be raised to your scheme at any rate."

"Let them remain under the same roof by all means, if it is convenient, provided the separation is otherwise distinct and complete. Of course there will arise a nominal increase of correspondences from the change, because formal letters would be substituted for the informal ones styled minute papers now employed; but I believe there would be an immediate reduction in reality, because if men had to do it formally instead of informally, they would soon become ashamed of bandying foolish references to and fro in the way that now goes on. But that is not my point. The change is imperatively called for, for much weightier reasons. It is fatal to efficiency that all these men, who should be responsible heads of executive departments, should have no distinct responsibility whatever, but do all their business down to the most trifling reference in the name

of the Secretary of State. They are not even recognised to the extent of being addressed by name by the executive officials who write to them. In fact, these heads of departments, notwithstanding their high-sounding titles, are virtually nothing but clerks. Let this fact be once thoroughly apprehended, and the necessity for reform will be admitted. Besides, what training can be worse for men who may be called on any day to run alone on active service, than that they should be allowed to shelter themselves from all responsibility for everything they do behind a bigger man?

"This evil, moreover, begets another. By employing men in this way as the irresponsible mouthpieces of the Minister, you encourage the tendency always sufficiently pronounced except in the firmest minds, to overdo *interference with others*. This, in fact, is the root of the over-centralisation which is the curse of our system. The executive officials all over the world who suffer from it cannot complain now, because it is all carried on in the name of the Secretary of State; but let the departmental chiefs, the Commissary-General, the Inspector-General of Fortifications, and so forth, be put at the heads of their own offices, and carry on business in their own names and on their own responsibility, and then they will be ashamed to practise this over-interference. At any rate, it will be at once seen where the blame lies.

"When this great reform shall have been carried out, the business of the Minister will then be limited to looking after the executive departments: to seeing that they do their work properly, instead of doing their work for them. That is the point to aim at. The functions of the War Minister, no expert, but a parliamentary officer, and liable to be constantly changed, should be ministerial, not executive.

"The authority of all officers, heads of departments as well as executive agents, have to be clearly defined. In fact, you want a distinct code of regulations for all army business, including audit and account. You will never get it till the War Office is reconstructed. For at present half our work seems to consist in discovering constructions and framing precedents for cases which ought never to come before us at all."

"You have said nothing about the Control Department in your memorial of grievances," remarked Strickland, after he had written all this down. "What do you propose to do as to that little matter?"

"Abolition, of course, of the concern in its present form, thereby having, I presume, all sensible men on our side."

"Well, before we proceed to draw down the wrath of the gods on our devoted heads, might I suggest that if we went upstairs, perhaps Mrs West would give us some tea."

Eva, however, had gone off to bed, and the tea on the side-table was quite cold.

"I am afraid Mrs West will hardly appreciate army reform, whether administrative or otherwise, if it involves long evenings passed in melancholy solitude. However, I had better take myself off too. I suppose we resume work to-morrow morning? At what time shall I come?"

"Suppose we say eleven?"

"Very well. Good-night."

CHAPTER XLVII.

ICONOCLASTIC.

"WE finished off last night," said Captain Strickland, as we set to work again in the back room of the little house by Queen's Gate—"we finished off by your darkly foreshadowing some impious designs against the Control Department. Your private secretary trembles, but begs you to proceed."

"Seriously, do you really think there will be much opposition to reform in that direction? I should rather hope that we may find this the easiest job of all, because public opinion—at any rate military opinion—appears ripe for the change. You can hardly find anybody to defend the present system."

"Burley will make a fight for maintaining things as they are."

"Of course, and will write paragraphs by the thousand, of which no one will be able to make out any meaning. But it is not so much demolition as reconstruction that is needed. The title, to begin with, is a complete misnomer; for why should the man

who feeds the army be called a controller, any more than he who fights it? The real controller of the troops on active service is the general, and so he should be at all times. But the present control system is altogether a case of over-centralisation. There is no necessary connection between the duties of feeding the troops, and keeping their stores, and issuing their pay; and to combine them under one head is really to over-weight it, in fact, to over-centralise under a false semblance of simplicity. I propose, therefore, that the three duties should be kept separate and distinct. Three departments, for Commissariat, Stores, and Pay, should be constructed out of the existing Control Department."

"But are you not losing sight here of the main object of the present system? These controllers were appointed, as I understand, expressly to relieve the general from the trouble of having to deal with so many separate departments. The controller relieves him of this, and so far there appears a *primâ facie* gain in the institution."

"This control arrangement was a reaction from the complexity which it superseded. Formerly the splitting up of business between various departments was altogether overdone. There were ordnance store departments, and general store departments, and medical store departments, and purveyors, and what not, with conflicting duties and divided responsibility, so that no one knew where to look to get anything done, as

witness the Crimean confusion. Moreover, the Commissariat were under two masters,—partly under the Treasury, and partly under the War Office. Then, again, there was no recognised organisation or responsibility in regard to army transport. The formation of the Control Department, by getting rid of these complications, was therefore a great step in the right direction. The mistake has been in carrying the change too far, and the secret of the mischievous course the thing has taken lies in this, that the executive head of the Control Department, combining also the functions of a leading official in the War Office, has used the authority of the Secretary of State to concentrate the inordinate amount of power and authority in his own person and that of the department he represents. Had the War Department been properly constituted from the first, in the manner now proposed, the different heads of executive departments being placed outside our office, and made formally responsible to the Secretary of State for the performance of their duties, while the latter held the balance of authority evenly between them and the army, this tyranny which one branch of the service has come to exercise over the rest could never have arisen. But the point does not admit of argument. The Control Department in its present form is absolutely indefensible, and no reform will be worth anything which does not begin with the demolition of it."

"But," objected Strickland, "is it not rather a bad time to propose a separation of the civil departments just now, when it is in contemplation to consolidate the different army staff departments, and to give each general a chief of the staff to stand between him and the other officers of the divisional staff? The popular idea seems to be that the general should have two principal *aides*—a chief of the staff for the military duties, and a controller (or whatever name he may go by) for the civil business. There appears a certain amount of symmetry about the notion, at any rate."

"The symmetry is in appearance only; there is really no analogy between the two cases. The military staff are merely the mouth-piece or *alter ego* of the general. They have no powers save what they derive from him, nor do they relieve him of any responsibility; they act only in his name and on his responsibility. Whether he gives his orders to the members of his staff direct, or through one principal staff-officer, is therefore merely a matter of administrative convenience. But the civil staff have specific duties, and the question is whether they should be directly responsible for the due performance of them to the general, or should an official of the controller species be interpolated between them? Another objectionable feature in the present arrangement is, that the Control Department profess not to recognise the general's staff, but only the general himself.

This would not be tolerated for a moment on active service, nor should it be allowed in peace time. Have a chief of the staff certainly, but he must be the general's representative not only with the combatant officers, but also with the civil departments. That the contrary practice should ever have been proposed is merely another instance of the intolerable pretensions of the Control Department, which could only have been admitted through the indirect influence it has established in our office.

"Moreover, whatever be the nominal centralisation, there must be in fact a division of duties between two such different things as feeding the army and keeping its stores. Although, therefore, the general may look to the controller to get the work done, the latter cannot do it himself; he must look in turn to the local heads of the two branches: there must be a separation of duties somewhere. The controller is therefore, in my view, merely an additional functionary needlessly interpolated.

"It is only fair to the War Office to point out that there this amount of decentralisation is already in force within its own walls. We have there our separate heads of the Commissariat and Store Departments. It is only at the district stations that the two are brought together under these controllers. Nor is this done always. At the larger stations it has already been found necessary to carry out the separation, and to have two separate officers, who,

although both called controllers, have distinct duties, one being in charge of stores, the other of supply. And what is found necessary in peace time would be still more so in war. To feed the army on a campaign is surely quite enough work for one department, and to manage the stores for another.

"Moreover, this is not a mere *doctrinaire* proposal for something which has never been tried. We have before us an example of the plan in full work, and which has stood the test of long actual practice. What I propose is, in fact, nothing more than the Indian system. There, whatever faults they may have in other ways, they certainly understand how to feed the army and keep it supplied with stores. The Indian Commissariat and Store Departments are both marvellously efficient, and with such examples before us it is wonderful we should not have thought of taking a lesson from them."

"How about artillery stores?" asked Strickland. "Many of the administrative doctors, including, I believe, most of your brother officers, are for keeping these separate from other stores. Nobody but themselves, they say, understands how to look after them properly."

"Artillery stores are the most important of all, and no doubt require special training for their management. But there is no need for two store departments. And since there must be an Ordnance Store Department in any case, I would solve the

difficulty by putting it in charge of all other stores also."

"Ah, people will say you propose this because you are a gunner yourself."

"I can't help that. Again I say, go to India for your pattern. There, what is known as the Ordnance Commissariat Department, which is officered entirely from my regiment, has charge of all the army stores (except clothing), which are kept in the ordnance magazines. And admirably the work is done."

"There is the Army Transport question still to be settled," said Strickland.

"Well, that is a more complex matter. Still I think it resolves itself in this way: In war time the Store Department and the Commissariat both want carriage, no doubt, besides the troops; but there is a decided advantage in having only one organised corps for transport service, and in peace time the Commissariat has most to do with transport. I would therefore attach the Army Transport Corps to the latter in peace time: on active service, and of course in peace time when necessary, the Commissariat would supply the needful carriage to the other branches.

"This, again, is the Indian system. The whole transport there is under the Commissariat, and they supply the Store Department as well as the troops both with carriage and cattle, and with the establishment to look after them. And the plan works without the smallest friction.

"After all, however, the secret of efficiency lies in harmonious decentralisation. The Indian system works so well because responsibility is distributed; because every one knows what he has to do, and is allowed to do it without being interfered with. Above all, the duty of acting is placed on the executive officers, and the ministerial officers at headquarters merely supervise. That is where we should learn to imitate them. If a force has to take the field in that country, the local executive officers are expected to make all the needful arrangements, acting upon merely general instructions. There is no telegraphing to headquarters, no shirking responsibility, no asking people at a distance to do what can only be done properly by those on the spot. This is not because people in India are exceptionally wise, but the system of decentralisation has grown up there out of the continual state of war in which the Indian army used to be engaged, and they have had the good sense to keep to it. The result is, that while a regiment or a battery may march from one end of India to the other without firing off a single telegram, the Indian War Department consists of a single secretary with a few assistants and clerks, and it gives them less fuss to make a war than it would cost us to send a brigade to Ireland. We happily have no wars to gain experience by; but we might at least make use of these peace manœuvres to learn what is wanted. Instead of

carrying on as we did last summer before the Yewcestershire campaign, discussing, minuting, ordering, telegraphing, working over-hours, and fussing generally, the share of our office in the matter should have been limited to general instructions. The real business should have been done out of the office. That is what we have to aim at. It is no use pedantically imitating the Germans in externals; parcelling out the troops over the country into army corps, or otherwise professing to decentralise, so long as all the military wires are pulled from Pall Mall. Real decentralisation—that is, the delegation of power and responsibility to others—is the thing to be aimed at. When we have a state of things under which the War Minister can feel sure that if he orders ten or twenty thousand men to be equipped for service, the local executive departments can and will carry out the order, without asking further questions; then, and not till then, have we reached the point of efficiency in our military administration."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

DEVELOPS SOME GENERAL IDEAS.

STRICKLAND and I next set to work on the second branch of our subject—the organisation of the army itself; but the memorandum which we drew up on this, the most important part of it, is too long to be detailed here, and must be reserved for a subsequent occasion, when the critical circumstances have to be described under which it first saw the light. One or two points of detail which we dealt with may, however, be set down in this place; as, for example, the proposed "*Change in mode of promoting and appointing General Officers.*"

"This is a branch of our organisation which still savours of the dark ages. It has escaped reform so far, but no part more needs overhauling. (Put all this down for Lord Stowe to read.) In all other grades the establishment is framed with reference to the wants of the service. There are only as many colonels, majors, and so on, as there is employment for. So with the various civil staffs, control, medi-

cal, &c. In all these the establishment consists of the persons who are required for duty in some capacity, and there are no idlers or supernumeraries. But the establishment of general officers has no sort of relation to the wants of the service. It constitutes, in fact, a virtual retired list, only a mere fraction of those borne on it ever obtaining employment after their promotion. The lieutenant-generals and full generals are scarcely ever employed at all. The whole arrangement is utterly unsuited to the real requirements of the case. The general officers of the army should be the men who are to lead it, or who have led it, and not merely elderly gentlemen who never have been, and never ought to be, and never will be, employed in this way."

"Well, but," objected my secretary, "have you not forgotten that the establishment of general officers forms an outlet for the colonels, and so keeps up promotion? Promotion without purchase will be bad enough in any case, as I have heard you yourself say frequently. If you reduce the general officers' list, it will become still worse."

"I doubt it. I suspect the establishment in its present form tends rather to retard promotion, by inducing men to hold on in expectation of becoming general officers, which they do by mere force of seniority. That is the vicious part of the arrangement. This of all grades is the very last in which mere seniority ought to be recognised as a claim, still less

the only claim; and the inconsistency is the greater now that selection has become established as the fitting ground for advancement in the junior grades. We want picked men for generals above everything. You may get along well enough with regimental officers of mediocre ability and elderly colonels, but the general officers should be the very cream of the army, in the prime of life and activity."

"You forget," answered Strickland, "that practically the system does provide a rude mode of selection, because scarcely one general in ten is ever employed. The remainder are no doubt on a sort of permanent half-pay, but the result is that there is really no call to employ any but good men, for out of such a large number there must always be a sufficient proportion of efficient generals to select for active duty."

"Yes; but what a clumsy plan, to put a man first on what is virtually, as you say, half-pay retirement, in order to bring him back afterwards to active employment! Why not keep him on the active list till you want him, and then bring him straightway on to the generals' establishment? We do select the general officers, as you say, for commands, and presumably the most efficient. But observe, they are not so efficient as they have been, because they go through a rusting interval on half-pay. Look at what commonly happens. A man distinguishes himself early in life, gets brevet rank, and so becomes a

major-general sooner than usual—say at forty-five. And then, when he is in the prime of life and efficiency, you place him on the shelf, for this is what his promotion comes to in reality; and so he waits for half-a-dozen years perhaps, eating his heart out at the clubs or in some country retirement, till it comes to his turn for a command. But when it does come, he is no longer the same man; he has grown older, and fallen behind in the march of professional knowledge."

"But I foresee," said Strickland, "one very strong objection to the plan you seem to have in view. Think what a ridiculously small list the establishment of generals would be reduced to, if it were to be limited merely to the men actually exercising commands as generals."

"Not at all. For—and here is another absurdity of the present system—having got this enormous establishment of generals, you don't, after all, make any use of them. The greater part of the appointments for which general officers are eligible are the commands of brigades, and yet to these it is usual to find that colonels are appointed, with acting commissions, and not general officers of the permanent establishment."

"You are speaking of brigadier-generals. We have no permanent officers of that rank in our service; they are always chosen from the colonels."

"My dear Strickland, you are as bad as Molière's

physician: *L'opium endormit parcequ'il a une virtu soporifique.* I ask why, when we have already three hundred other generals to choose from, do we appoint colonels to be brigadier-generals? and you reply, because we always choose brigadier-generals from the colonels. There can be no reason for doing so, except that the generals on the permanent establishment are not up to the mark. It is not as if brigades were temporary things; there will always be brigades in the British army just as much as battalions, and there is no conceivable reason why the command of them should not be recognised as a permanent rank."

"My dear fellow, if I appear to be tending towards softening of the brain, please ascribe it to my desire to play devil's advocate properly. At the same time, I think in this particular case you have overlooked what is surely the special merit of the present system —namely, that brigadiers are strictly selected officers, and are not appointed, like the senior generals, by mere force of seniority. This is surely a real advantage."

"But I do not want to abolish the present system, so far as the power of selecting goes. The change I advocate is, that selection should be applied to every command. The rank of brigadier-general (or better, brigade-general) should be a permanent one, just as that of major-general is now; and no promotion should be made to it, or to the superior ranks, except to fill a qualifying appointment. In fact, I propose

to extend to the general officers' list the rule which obtains in all other ranks. Just as a man can become a lieutenant-colonel or a captain only by succession to a battalion or a company, so in future a colonel should be promoted to general only on appointment to a brigade, and he should get the next step only in virtue of appointment to a major-general's command."

"Observe, too, another advantage of this reform, that it would save men from being promoted *too quickly*, as often happens now. It has frequently occurred in India within my own knowledge, that an active young brigadier, who was made a colonel for distinguished service, has been ejected from his command before half his tour of service is completed, by untimely promotion to major-general. And then, while he goes home to potter about at Bath or Cheltenham, wasting the best years of his life, the vacant brigade is taken up by some man old enough to be his father. Thus the service loses in both ways. Under my plan no man would be liable to dispossession, at any rate till his term of office was completed."

"What would become of him then?"

"He would become a general officer unattached, unless reappointed, or until promoted to a higher command, and therefore to the next higher grade. The list of brigade- and major-generals would therefore be made up of the officers holding the different

brigade and divisional commands of the army, and those who had held them previously."

"And what about the lieutenant-generals?"

"That grade should be done away with. Three ranks would be quite sufficient for all purposes—general, major-general, brigade-general. The first would be limited to those holding the chief command in India and other principal appointments, and those who have held them already. Here see another absurdity of our beautiful system as now administered. You select a man, presumably the most distinguished and efficient in the army, for the Indian command-in-chief, incomparably the most important post in the army, and you give him while holding it the *acting* rank of full general. When he returns home he reverts to his old position of lieutenant-general. And this is done, forsooth, to save the delicate sensibilities of the other lieutenant-generals that they may not be superseded. Superseded in what? In the privilege of living at the clubs, apparently, for that is the principal occupation of the greater number of them. But in truth the sensitiveness of unemployed generals about being superseded, and the deference shown to that sensibility, is perfectly inexplicable. In every other grade supersession goes on to the fullest extent quite unchecked. The accidents of the service; the better or worse promotion in different regiments; brevets; till quite lately purchase; make supersession the rule rather

than the exception in the British army; and very properly too, if it is conducted on a proper system, for there can be no efficiency without selection, and the preference for one man means the supersession of others. But when the higher grades are reached, where it becomes more than ever important to apply the principle of selection, because the duties to be performed call for exceptional qualities, then the principle of selection stops. Provided a man lives to become a general officer by force of seniority, he goes on rising by virtue of the same negative quality right through the three ranks."

"In all which observations my chief has his faithful secretary entirely with him."

"Then look at the absurd fuss made a few years ago about the alleged supersession of the generals on the British list by those on the Indian. It was observed that the former were getting promoted faster than the other, which was just what any one could have foreseen must happen from the conditions of the regulating warrant. And so forthwith there are memorials, and royal commissions, and what not, in order to redress the grievance. One might have thought men would prefer to be superseded, since promotion nowadays acts as a disability rather than otherwise; at any rate, to a man performing no military duty of any kind, the grievance, it might be supposed, would not be very keenly felt. However, provided for it was, and a beautiful new regulation

laid down to prevent anybody from ever superseding anybody else under any possible combination of circumstances."

"This, in my poor opinion," said Strickland, "is about the best thing you have proposed. But I suspect you will find the generals' list a tough nut to crack. They are a very influential set of old fellows, especially those who are in the Lords."

"Tough or influential, they will find John Graham Merrifield quite a match for them, if he can only be persuaded to go into the matter. But the change, I verily believe, would be heartily approved by the army at large, and by the country too, when once understood. The fact is, the present system is absolutely indefensible, and must be abandoned if inquired into. The wonder is that it has held out so long. To talk about reforming army organisation, and then leave this part of it untouched, would truly be an impotent conclusion."

"There is one thing to be observed," said Strickland; "how is all this patronage to be dispensed without arousing the jealousy that attaches to all patronage nowadays? You may have obstructives, in Parliament and out of it, coming forward to propose all kinds of conditions and checks on the disposal of these appointments, which would nullify all power of free selection, and reduce the system to pure seniority, or something as feeble. Competitive examinations, perhaps; who knows what folly the

advocates of unlimited competition are not capable of proposing? And after all I am not sure they would not have some reason on their side, at least so far as demanding a check of some sort. Patronage pure and simple would be jobbed to a certainty."

"There appears to me little cause for apprehension on that score. Patronage of appointments involving no responsibility might and would be jobbed no doubt; but where, from the nature of the case, the credit of those who dispense the patronage is involved in making good appointments, I believe you will find men act up to their responsibility."

"This faith is very refreshing to witness, especially in an official so experienced as the Under-Secretary of State. I wish I could bring myself to take such a trustful view of human nature."

"I think we have every reason to be trustful, notwithstanding your sneer, by a simple appeal to facts. Are not the best men among the generals selected for commands as a rule? Then look at the appointments made to the colonelcies or regiments in the line and cavalry. Here is patronage of a most valuable kind—handsome life-annuities to give away. Yet can anybody say that they are not bestowed with extreme fairness, upon the grounds of good service and seniority combined?"

"You have cited about the only case in your favour."

"It is the only one that exists. There is no other

systematic patronage of appointments on a large scale to be found at home. But I will take another equally pertinent—the Indian Civil Service. The appointments here are the most valuable in the world; governors, councillors, commissioners, secretaries, all appointed solely by selection, without reference to seniority. And accordingly you find men brought up by patronage to the top of the professional tree in twenty or five-and-twenty years, while others of less ability remain in subordinate posts throughout their official days. And the choice will in almost all cases be endorsed by the services themselves. I will take another precedent still more to the point. Every appointment in the Indian army, the staff, commands of regiments, second-in-command, adjutantcies—every appointment is made by unrestricted selection, pure and simple, and no one can say that this immense patronage has not been administered, on the whole, by successive commanders in chief with extraordinary fairness. In fact, the mode of regimental appointments is about the only good thing in the Indian army system. The truth is in these matters men rise up to the level of the responsibilities placed on them. When patronage is not worth having, men job it; when it is large, and the working of a great administration is involved in choosing fit agents, patronage is pretty sure to be honestly dealt with. A tendency to job is not inherent in English statesmen, and my belief is that they

admitted the nuisance of competition in its present form, not because they mistrusted their own morality, but because they found patronage of the kind now replaced by competition an intolerable bore."

"The devil's advocate stands or rather sits silenced as well as convinced. Are there any more cobwebs to be swept away by your vigorous broom?"

"Let me see. Yes, of course, there is one most important point still to be set down: The reorganisation of the Indian army."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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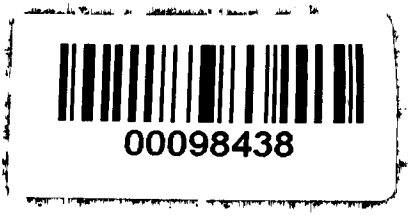
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